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A Schism in Youth Baseball and its Lingering Effects: A Case Study of One Community's Experience

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A Schism in Youth Baseball and its Lingering Effects: A Case Study of
One Community's Experience

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION,
LEADERSHIP AND COUNSELING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAINT THOMAS

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Richard Michael DeMarco

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

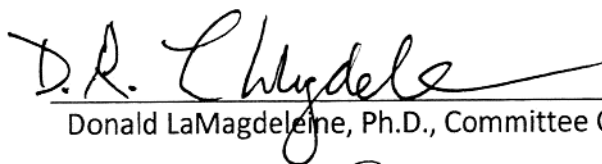
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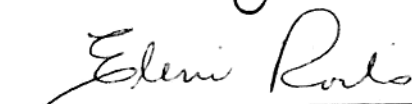
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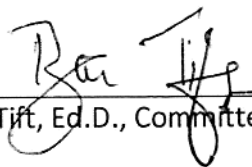
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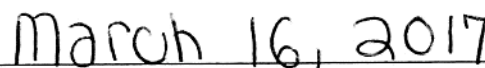
We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee



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I cannot find the words to express my gratitude to my chair, Dr. Don LaMagdeleine. He wisely and patiently guided me to learn new ways to grow as a researcher. Special thanks to committee members Dr. Eleni Roulis and Dr. Bob Tift, and the members of cohort 14. I appreciated your ongoing support and encouragement throughout the qualitative research process.

Abstract

This case study explored the experience of parent coaches in an urban, Midwestern youth baseball setting. Data collection included personal communication with fifteen expert coaches, along with an examination of historical emails, league records and newspaper articles. The initial research questions focused on how coaches create meaning for youth sport participants. However, a schism event and its effects emerged as a significant theme, along with the resulting challenges faced by Little League coaches. The Little League organization operated as the sole option for youth baseball since 1951. In 2001, an alternative “Traveling” option began competing with Little League by branding itself as “competing at the highest level of competition.” Little League symbolically became a “recreational” option, inconsistent with the myth of the Little League World Series. This increasingly competitive context made the job of a Little League coach more difficult. Participants discussed managing perceived favoritism and balancing the objectives of “competing” and “having fun” as the top challenges, and identified the attributes of an effective coach as relating to others, managing talent and leveraging rules. A dynamic coaching model emerged with four coach types, differentiated by baseball intelligence and talent management skills. Findings suggest additional research on the value of a child committing to a single sport, how to improve youth coach recruiting and development, and to better understand the business of youth sports.

Keywords: Little League, parent coach, traveling baseball, coach effectiveness, coaching model, competing and having fun, business of youth sports, managing favoritism

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	III
ABSTRACT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: RELEVANT AND ANALYTIC LITERATURE REVIEW	4
<i>History of Little League</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>From Patriotic Community Organization to Market Competition</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Research Studies on Little League.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Parents of Youth Sport Participants.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Coaches of Youth Sport Participants.....</i>	<i>13</i>
RELEVANT ANALYTICAL THEORY	16
<i>Rituals, Myths & Collective Representations</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Division of Labor.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Social Strain.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Moral Career, Dramaturgical Analysis & Impression Management.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Taxonomic Analysis.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Schism</i>	<i>24</i>
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	25
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	25
<i>Methodological Framework: Symbolic Interactionism</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Grounded Theory Research.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Case Research</i>	<i>27</i>
DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPATION	28
<i>Research Setting</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Participant Profiles.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Interviewing Procedure.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Data Analysis.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Personal Bias.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Limitations & Delimitations</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Ethical Considerations.....</i>	<i>43</i>
CHAPTER THREE: THE MORAL CAREER OF A LITTLE LEAGUE COACH.....	44
<i>Becoming a Coach.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Insights and Lessons Learned.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Social Reality of a Youth Baseball Team</i>	<i>55</i>
CHAPTER FOUR: CONTESTING THE NATURE OF YOUTH BASEBALL	59
EVOLUTION OF TWO COMPETING ORGANIZATIONS.....	59

<i>Little League and 1950s Values</i>	59
<i>Culture of Competition & Privatization</i>	60
<i>Schism Story in Sterling City</i>	62
<i>Mission, Purpose & Goals</i>	65
<i>Community Engagement Discourse</i>	67
<i>Myths and Childhood Experiences</i>	72
YOUTH BASEBALL TAXONOMY, PRE AND POST SCHISM.....	75
<i>Developing Child for the Future</i>	78
<i>Increasingly More Difficult Rules & Control</i>	79
<i>Winning as an Objective</i>	84
<i>Committed to (More) Baseball</i>	87
ATTEMPTS TO BRIDGE THE SCHISM	90
CHAPTER FIVE: THE DRAMATURGY OF THE PARENT COACH	92
SCENE 1: MANAGING PERCEIVED FAVORITISM	92
<i>Dilemmas of Coaching One’s Child</i>	95
<i>Variations of Coaching Dramaturgy</i>	98
Example Maker	99
Opportunity Spoiler	102
Record Keeper.....	104
SCENE II: THE BALANCE OF COMPETING AND HAVING FUN.....	106
<i>The Taxonomy of Fun Verses Competition in Little League</i>	107
Cultural Constraints	110
Player Participation.....	112
Coach Perspectives on Rules	114
CHAPTER SIX: THE ORIGIN AND PRACTICES OF COACHES.....	120
OVERVIEW OF COACH RECRUITING & DEVELOPMENT.....	120
ATTRIBUTES OF AN EFFECTIVE COACH.....	122
<i>Relating to Others</i>	122
<i>Talent Management</i>	128
<i>Baseball Intelligence (Leveraging Rules)</i>	137
DYNAMIC MODEL FOR COACH TYPES	138
<i>Enlisted</i>	139
<i>Exploiter</i>	140
<i>Altruistic</i>	143
<i>Ideal</i>	145
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	148
CONCLUSIONS	148
<i>The Introduction of Competition into Youth Baseball</i>	148
<i>The Dramaturgy of the Parent Coach</i>	149
<i>Becoming a Coach Type</i>	151
IMPLICATIONS.....	151

<i>Institutions</i>	152
<i>Youth Sports Administrators</i>	153
<i>Coaches</i>	154
<i>Parents</i>	155
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	155
REFERENCES	159
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM	166
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	169
APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL	170
APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT	172

List of Figures

FIGURE 1 - PARTICIPANT PROFILES.....	31
FIGURE 2 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.....	67
FIGURE 3 – PRIOR TO 2001.....	75
FIGURE 4 – POST BIRTH OF TRAVELING LEAGUE.....	76
FIGURE 5 – MANAGING FAVORITISM.....	98
FIGURE 6 – COACHES TAXONOMY OF EXPERIENCE.....	108
FIGURE 7 – DYNAMIC COACHING MODEL.....	139

Introduction

Competition is an integral part of American culture. Free trade agreements and regulation of monopolies are examples. The government develops these economic policies to encourage competition, which benefits consumers through better product choices and lower costs. Youth baseball is a subset of this broader culture of competition. Since its inception in the 1950s, the Little League organization has been the primary brand of youth baseball in the United States. It was rooted the mythos of Major League Baseball as the national pastime. In the last thirty years, a new “Traveling” brand of baseball has emerged. Instead of Little League having a monopoly, the organization must now compete for players. This change has impacted how parents symbolically view these programs and how they make a choice. Some parents choose Little League as a nostalgic reflection of the “good old days.” Others choose “Traveling” as a symbol of “competing at the highest level of competition.”

The setting for this study is youth baseball in Sterling City, an urban Midwestern location. Youth baseball is a competitive sport, whereby the outcome of each game yields a winner and a loser. Competition is not an outcome, but the means to an end. Parent coaches develop their teams to compete. They need to deliver a fun, competitive experience, while at same time manage the dynamic of interacting with their own child. In addition, parent coaches must often choose a program for their child based on the degree to which they and their child want to coach & compete. The concept of competition is at the core of the challenges faced by parent coaches.

My research topic was discover how parent coaches think about their roles, and

the challenge of creating a positive experience for participants in youth sports. The purpose was exploratory, to “identify and discover important categories of meaning” (Marshall, 1999). This research is theoretically significant to those studying the practice of coaching. Much is written about how to develop skills in children. However, very little is written regarding how parent coaches evolve in their role while managing sometimes conflicting priorities. Although this study will focus on youth baseball, the issue of coaching for other sports in both highly organized and informal contexts is likely to get increasing attention from both practitioners and scholars. The general research questions at the beginning of the study focused on the experience of parent coaches. Data analysis themes included a schism within the research setting that resulted in a new conflict between two competing baseball organizations. The new direction of the research was to better understand the conflict and the lingering effects.

I began my youth baseball career as a player when I was nine years old. As an adult, I coached two sons in the research setting, and served various administrative roles on both the Little League and Babe Ruth boards. I became interested in researching youth baseball as a result of the challenges I faced as a coach. It is a volunteer role and comes with little training. Some coaches begin their youth sports career with formal baseball experience. Most volunteer with limited knowledge. It is easy to learn how to teach a kid to swing a bat. How do you learn how to balance competing with having fun? How does a parent coach learn how to manage the perception that they may be favoring their own child? As a coach, these questions motivated me to initiate this research.

From an administrative stand point, I know firsthand how important coaches are to the success of a youth baseball program. As a former President of Sterling City Little League, I used to remind board members that that we could have perfectly manicured fields, pleasant weather, expertly chalked bases and delicious concessions. However, if we did not have effective coaches, the kids would not have a good experience. Player engagement and retention is highly contingent on the effectiveness of the coach. At the end of my youth baseball career, I was responsible for coach recruiting and development. I hope that this research can contribute additional insights to help volunteer coaches and administrators.

I thoroughly enjoyed this research project, especially interacting with coaches to share stories and insights. Reflecting on the history of youth baseball in Sterling City was enlightening and frustrating. The schism in Sterling City occurred over fifteen years ago. An alternate course of action may have avoided the schism and resulted in a better future for the baseball community. While I appreciate that the actors were volunteers, there are clearly leadership lessons that can be gleamed from this case study for coaches and youth sport administrators.

CHAPTER ONE: Relevant and Analytic Literature Review

For relevant literature, I begin with a brief history of Little League in the context of broader changes in American society, and follow with research regarding Little League, and parents and coaches of youth sport participants.

History of Little League

The history of Little League can be understood through the organization's mission, and the story of its inception, growth, economics and operating processes. The following is the present day mission of Little League as noted on its website

littleleague.org:

“Little League Baseball, Incorporated is a non-profit organization whose mission is to ‘to promote, develop, supervise, and voluntarily assist in all lawful ways, the interest of those who will participate in Little League Baseball and Softball.’

Through proper guidance and exemplary leadership, the Little League program assists children in developing the qualities of citizenship, discipline, teamwork and physical well-being. By espousing the virtues of character, courage and loyalty, the Little League Baseball and Softball program is designed to develop superior citizens rather than superior athletes.”

On the organizations website, you can also see a chronology of Little League from its humble inception to today. It began the summer of 1939 when Carl E. Stotz organized neighborhood kids to play baseball. A year later, Stotz created the Little League organization. There were three teams and the kids were given uniforms from money donated by local businesses. Over the next seven years, growth in Little League

slowed down as a result of World War II. In 1951, the first Little League organization outside of the United States was formed in British Columbia, Canada. By 1952, Little League expanded to 1,500 programs. More than 5,500 programs exist by 1960 and the organization peaked in 1996 with more than 7,452 programs and almost 3 million kids. Participation has declined since 1996. In 2007, there were 7,030 leagues and 2.6 million kids. As of the writing of this paper, participation is at 2.4 million. This has been generally attributed to an increase in the number of Traveling baseball organizations and the increasing popularity of sports such as soccer and lacrosse.

Each Little League program is responsible for operating expenses. Sterling City Little League, for example, collects registration fees from players, receives donations from sponsors (businesses and community organizations) and sells concession goods to cover league expenses. In addition, Sterling City Little League pays an annual charter fee to Little League.

The Little League World Series is the capstone event of the baseball season. This event is held in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, the site where Stotz's original three teams played. The first Little League World Series was played in 1947. CBS first televised the World Series in 1953. By 1963, the World Series moved to ABC's Wide World of Sports as a nationally televised event. In 1987, Little League began its relationship with ESPN. Little League renewed the ESPN contract in 2007 for 8 years at \$30.5 million. At the time, Stephen D. Keener, the current President and Chief Executive Officer of Little League, encouraged the World Series for its (televised) publicity and the provision of "more than \$1 million in direct financial benefits to local Little League programs"

(littleleague.org). ESPN renewed the contract in 2013 for \$60 million through the year 2022.

Little League is led by a volunteer Board of Directors. With headquarters in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Little League is organized into regional offices led by Regional Directors. Each region is divided into districts overseen by a District Officer. Districts are composed of leagues managed by a President. Each league is a separate and distinct, non-profit organization. Leagues annually renew their charter with Little League and use the operating manual and rules to deliver a baseball program. Processes such as how to draft teams exist in the operating manual. Umpires use the rule books to manage games. While local leagues do have the authority to amend rules, there are limits. National rules such as those related to safety are strongly encouraged and enforced to maintain a charter. Little League does not have the resources to ensure that all leagues follow the rules; however, tournament eligibility is a control point. In order to enter teams into district or national tournaments such as the Little League World Series, leagues must follow the rules.

From Patriotic Community Organization to Market Competition

The origin and evolution of Little League as an organization coincided with broader changes in American society. Originating in 1939, Little League's growth in the 1950s followed the post-World War II trends in the United States. According to Stephanie Coontz, the decade of the 1950s was very prosperous for Americans as "housing starts exploded after the war, peaking at 1.65 million in 1955" (Coontz, 1992). American home ownership increased from 43 percent in 1940 to 62 percent in 1960.

Discretionary income doubled during this same time (Coontz, 1992). This is also when the idea of the traditional American family formed, portrayed through media sit-coms such as “Leave It to Beaver” and “Ozzie and Harriet.” These were the “good old days” that many people refer to with feelings of nostalgia (Coontz, 1992). During this same time period, Carl Stotz founded Little League. He coined the term “Little League” with the idea of providing a “wholesome program of baseball for the boys . . . as a way to teach them the ideals of sportsmanship, fair play and teamwork” (littleleague.org).

In 1955, nine year old George W. Bush played catcher for Central Little League of Midland, Texas. He would become the first Little Leaguer to become President of the United States. A few years later, Little League was unanimously granted a federal charter by the Senate and House of Representatives on July 16, 1964. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the charter into law the next day. The following is an excerpt from the Little League website:

“The legislation . . . is the highest recognition that the Federal Government can accord. It provides for incorporation of Little League in all 50 states and endows the program with protective integrity by the U.S. Government. Action of the President and Congress places Little League in same category as Red Cross, Boy Scouts, Boys Clubs of America and a select group of other agencies similarly chartered.”

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy proclaimed the last week in June as National Little League week. In 1980, Vice President George H. W. Bush, a former Little League coach, threw the first pitch at the Little League World Series championship game. Many

current and former Major League Baseball players and Commissioners also participate in and support Little League. Over the years, Little League was increasingly developed in the mold of a government services organization, expected to comply with policies such as open access and non-discrimination. For example, three years after President Richard M. Nixon signed Title IX into law, the Little League charter was amended to allow girls to play.

In his book, *The Leadership Imagination: An introduction to Taxonomic Leadership Analysis*, Don LaMagdeleine analyzes changes in economic and social policy through taxonomic analysis. From Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, the United States economic and fiscal policy focused on the expansion of government services through spending on welfare programs (LaMagdeleine, 2016). The early formation and cultural development of Little League occurred within this policy environment. The narrative began to change in the 1980s when President Ronald W. Reagan enacted a series of entitlement and tax cuts. In addition, he created momentum for the idea of the "privatization" of government services versus the expansion of government services. Examples include his formal announcement of the establishment of the Commission on Privatization in 1987. The idea was that a "shift in ownership or control from public to private hands [would] necessarily lead to cheaper, better services for the citizenry" (Goodman & Loveman, 1991). As the role of government evolved in the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of a "privatized" form of youth baseball emerged. This brand of youth baseball is commonly

referred to as “Traveling,” and now competes with Little League for players and for status as “competing at the highest level of competition.”

Research Studies on Little League

Perhaps the most significant research related to Little League is Gary Fine’s work, *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture*. Fine lived and breathed Little League through participant observation that spanned three years. He was in the trenches with the players, coaches, umpires and parents, but primarily collected data from kids and coaches. One of the criticisms of Little League that Fine noted was that “most coaches lack[ed] formal training, and in none of the leagues studied was there any systematic attempt to train coaches to deal with the problems of children” (Fine, 1987). Despite the lack of training, most parents surveyed were relatively happy with the coaches, the level of competitiveness and the emphasis on winning.

Given that Little League has changed over the last thirty years, there are four distinct differences between Fine’s research and the questions that I explored. First, Fine observed that Little League caused physical injuries. As a former District Safety Officer, my experience is that the right controls, such as pitch count rules, are now in place to minimize injuries. That is a specific example of a change that Little League has made since Fine’s research. Second, most of his work is focused on coaches and kids. His reference to parents is brief as he mentions problems such as over-involvement and under-involvement. He also makes a reference to Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis – that the role of Little League parents is audience (Fine, 1987). My research is focused on

the perspective of the combined role of the parent coach and possible administrator. For example, I was a parent coach and the President of the Sterling City Little League.

A third difference between this research and Fine's study is that my involvement in Little League is from an insider perspective. I played Little League as a child, coached both of my sons and served multiple roles on a local board. Finally, Little League was a growing organization when Fine did his research. As I embark on my research questions, Little League has been declining in leagues and players since 1996. Because of these differences, I believe that my research will update Fine's contribution, while accounting for cultural, demographic and historical changes in society along with systemic changes within Little League.

Parents of Youth Sport Participants

There is a growing amount of research related to parents of youth sport participants. Relevant literature discusses sportsmanship, involvement and the balance between support and pressure.

There are many stories about abusive parents at sporting events. What surprises me more than the stories is the amount of information and tools that address the issue. For example, the Catholic School of the Diocese of Pittsburgh created "training for its coaches and video training for parents on their role and behavior during sports events" (Riely, 2011). There is also an organization called The National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) which brands itself as setting "a standard for parent orientation programs by providing a video-based training which offers a simple, effective way to make youth sports parents aware of their roles and responsibilities, as well as ways they can make

their child's experience more enjoyable and positive" (nays.org). The organization currently charges a membership fee of \$20 for coaches and \$9.95 for parents.

I could not find research on trends such as how contemporary parents compare to parents in previous generations. However, I did find research on adult spectators. A number of studies "provide strong evidence for social identity theory in the sport domain and suggest that this perspective is a useful framework for understanding the social perspective of spectators" (Wann & Grieve, 2005). The idea is that parents associate themselves with certain groups and that this association would increase their self-esteem. For example, if a child did well at tryouts and achieved the highest level of play, the parent could have a Majors level player compared to a Minors level player. This would be an accomplishment for the parent. On each team, there are kids who play well and kids who do not play well. Each kid has a parent and the parent could identify positively or negatively, from a self-esteem perspective, depending on the success of their child. While my research is not specifically on the sportsmanship of parents at youth sport events, the motivations of parents may be a factor in the experience of parent coaches.

Keegan, Hardwood, Spray and Lavalley conducted a study to determine how social agents such as coaches, parents and peers influence the motivation of youth sport participants (2008). Through interviewing kids between the ages of 7-11 across various sports, the researchers found that coaches have the most influence on performance; parent's influence learning and peers influence competitiveness (Keegan et al., 2008). Parents facilitate learning by bringing kids to practice and games, providing emotional

support, encouraging practice and praising the child. They also found that “children preferred to receive less instruction from parents” (Keegan et al., 2008). How do parents manage the challenge of coaching their own child? That is one of my primary research questions.

For many youth sport organizations, the coaches are parents. For example, Sterling City Little League had ninety-seven parent coaches in 2009. Only two coaches did not have children in the program. Given the finding for what children prefer concerning parental involvement (Keegan et al., 2008), how do involved parent coaches’ influence their child? Maureen Weiss and Susan Fretwell conducted a study of the parent-coach and child-athlete relationship with kids in a soccer program (2005). The parents and children were asked about the positive and negative aspects of the relationship. The child-athletes identified “perks, praise, technical instruction, and understanding of ability level, insider information, and involvement in decision making, special attention, quality time and motivation as benefits. Costs of being coached by ones parent included negative emotional responses, pressure and expectations, conflict, lack of understanding and empathy, criticism for mistakes and unfair behavior” (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). From the perspective of the father-coach, benefits included “pride in son’s achievements, positive social interactions, opportunity to teach skills and values, enjoying coaching son, and quality time. Negatives included inability to separate parent-child from coach-player role, placing greater expectations and pressure on son, and showing differential attention toward son” (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005).

Additional research on parental influence and involvement distinguishes between parental support and pressure. Kanters, Bocarro & Casper studied the relationship between how parents' attitudes and behaviors influenced their child's participation in sports. They found that a "parent's perception of the amount of pressure they imposed on their child [was] consistently lower than the scores reported by their children" (Kanters et al., 2008). Similarly, previous research has reported that pre-competition anxiety, perceived competence, and internal control was directly linked to parental expectations, involvement, and perceived pressure" (Weiss, Weise, & Klint, 1989). Conversely, parental support can lead to greater enjoyment for youth sport participants (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986).

Coaches of Youth Sport Participants

There was a substantial amount of literature related to coaches in youth sports. Much of that literature discusses how coaches can develop skills. Tools include items such as practice planning, line up formats and utilizing a coaching staff. In addition to tools, the most relevant literature and research relates to efficacy, the power of coaches to be effective.

How can a coach be effective? What are the metrics for success? Is it winning, returning players, parent and player satisfaction or number of complaints? I did not find a consistent accepted best practice for coach effectiveness. Few of these volunteer organizations have the tracking and reporting capability. However, a tool does exist that is tested for paid high school and college coaches, The Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES). This tool measures efficacy criteria such as motivation, game strategy, years playing

experience and internal social support. Feltz, Hepler, Roman and Paiement (2009) tested whether or not the CES tool would work for volunteer youth sport coaches. In previous work, Feltz described efficacy as “coaches’ belief in their ability to affect the learning performance of their athletes” (Feltz, Chase, Moritz & Sullivan, 1999). After interviewing almost five hundred volunteer coaches, the researchers found that the CES tool was applicable to youth sports. Results indicated that “more confident coaches had more extensive playing and coaching background, felt their players improved more throughout the season, and perceived more support than did less confident coaches, particularly in regard to technique and game strategy efficacy” (Feltz et al., 2009). An additional finding was that coaching efficacy correlates to a winning record (Feltz et al., 1999).

“Fun” is one of the outcomes that you often hear related to coaching effectiveness. If the kids are having fun, then the coach must be going a good job. Bengoechea, Streaan & Williams explored the coach perception of fun in youth sports (2004). Through interviewing coaches, the researchers found that conflict exists between skill development and fun and that there are multiple meanings of fun. Streaan and Holt (2000) found that development is a major component of fun for kids when linked with achievement. They contend that many coaches do not conduct learning activities in a way that is fun for children. Intra team scrimmages, for example, are an opportunity for both fun and development. Streaan and Holt (2000) also recommend that coaches do not alternate between fun and skill development activities, but instead, integrate skill development into activities that kids perceive as fun. Other research has

found a strong correlation between having fun and retention of players. Kids with very strong skills withdrew from a sport simply because they were not having fun (Gould & Horn, 1988; Gould & Petlichkoff, 1998).

Personal characteristics of coaches and players can impact coaching effectiveness. Gilbert, Gilbert and Trudel identified two attributes: “Communicating with a diverse group of athletes and dealing with the dual role of parent-coach” (2001). One way to communicate with a diverse team is to use multiple mediums. Coaches may draw diagrams, demonstrate the specific skill or have a discussion (Martens, 1996; Salmela, 1996). Thompson (1995) suggests that distributing communication across a coaching team is effective. Then coaches can contribute their unique perspective and style. This prevents one dominant approach that works for some kids and does not work for others. While difficult, a third approach is to individualize communication with each player (Gilbert, et al., 2001).

The dual role of parent coach can be difficult to balance. Coaches need to make sure that their child made the team and is given opportunities based on skill. If the coach’s child should not have made the team or is given special opportunities, it disrupts the team and the relationship with the other parents. Conversely, a coach may behave in a way that proves that his or her child is worthy of the team even when it is not necessary (Gilbert et al., 2001). Another challenge for parent coaches is the expectation that their child is a role model for the team. Paying special attention to their own child and potentially disciplining their own child more than other children disrupts the team chemistry and can impact overall effectiveness. Coaches also need to

keep an eye on favoritism. If coaches spend too much time with their child, it may cause problems with other parents (Strean, 1995; Thompson, 1995). To avoid the problems that come with the parent coach role, the coaches should have someone else monitor their behavior, an assistant coach or team parent (Thompson, 1995).

Interacting with parents is also a component of effectiveness. A confrontation can be a function of the motivations of the player, parent and coach. It can be public if the parent is angry enough to yell within hearing distance of team members and other parents. While not frequent, a poorly managed confrontation can be severe and affect an entire season (Dickson & LeBlanc, 1997; Strean, 1995). Ways to handle difficult parents include a cool down period after games, parent meeting at beginning of season to discuss coaching philosophy and to have parents sign a code of conduct (Gilbert et al., 2001).

Relevant Analytical Theory

Émile Durkheim has been referred to as the father of sociology. His legacy includes establishing sociology as an academic discipline (Calhoun, 2002). Two distinct wings of Durkheimian thinking have emerged, the macro and micro traditions (Collins, 1994). The macro tradition is the large-scale structure of society and the micro tradition is the small-scale interactions and rituals (Collins, 1994). Within the functionalist, macro-tradition, Robert Merton developed a theory of social strain based on Durkheim's concepts of deviance and anomie. Influenced by Durkheim's theories of ritual and myth, micro-tradition thinkers such as Erving Goffman and Bruce Lincoln developed theories of dramaturgical analysis and taxonomic analysis. Throughout this study, I used

Durkheim as a foundational thinker and complemented his theory with those of Merton, Goffman and Lincoln.

Rituals, Myths & Collective Representations

Durkheim studied the origin of religion in his book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. He argued that religion is “something eminently social” (Durkheim, 1912 [1966]), bringing together its members through rites and rituals. Durkheim explained rituals as “collective behaviors conducted in conjunction with seasonal, survival, developmental and totemic societal traditions” (Durkheim, 1912 [1966]). Rituals focus people’s attention on the same thing, focusing group member attention and eventually shaping their interpretations of collective events. The Little League operating model can be thought of as a ritual. Each season begins with registration and ends with the Little League World Series. All activities and events in between are defined through schedules, operating procedures and meetings. These activities (rituals) can “excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups” (Durkheim, 1912 [1966]), resulting in deepened member loyalty to the program.

Durkheim believed that “mythic accounts and their logic were the glue of every society” (LaMagdeleine, 2016). Through his study of primitive religions, he described a polarity that exists in mythic accounts:

“All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: the presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by

two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words profane and sacred” (Durkheim, 1912 [1966]).

The mythic account of Little League baseball is rooted in the growth of the organization in the 1950s. It is a flashback to a prosperous time in American history that people look back to with feelings of nostalgia. It was a time of building communities and establishing the tradition of the modern family (Coontz, 1992). Today’s youth sport context has a polarity reminiscent to that described by Durkheim, between recreational and Traveling programs for kids.

Durkheim referred to the entirety of cultural assumptions as “collective representations” (Durkheim, 1912, [1966]). This is when a symbol embodies the collective beliefs of a social group. The wedding ring is an example of a collective representation. A spouse most likely wants their counterpart to wear a wedding ring. It is not because it is a piece of jewelry. It is because of cultural rules and values the ring symbolizes, which “exist beyond just one couple and have been socially agreed upon by numerous people to constitute a social reality” (Bell, 2012). What are the collective representations in a youth baseball context? Using Durkheim’s theory can help explain how the power of myths, rituals and collective representations result in classification and meaning in youth baseball.

Division of Labor

Durkheim’s doctoral dissertation was published as *The Division of Labor in Society*. Throughout the book, Durkheim describes how societies maintain social order. He calls this solidarity and identifies two types, mechanical and organic (Durkheim, 1873

[1964]). The mechanical society is primitive. People in this society generally have similar beliefs and act for the “common good.” Society is held together based on similarities, not differences (Durkheim, 1873 [1964]). The organic society is more industrial, populated and advanced in thinking about technology and legal systems. People in an organic society specialize in their roles and are rewarded based on merit. This society is held together based on differences, not similarities (Durkheim, 1873 [1964]). Like the transition from a mechanical to organic society, youth baseball has evolved over the years from a collective system of participation to now include specialized programs based on talent.

Social Strain

Influenced by Durkheim, Robert Merton developed a theory of social strain. His argument is that society defines goals for which individuals should aspire and the means to achieve the goals (Merton, 1938). Social strain happens when an individual cannot achieve the goal via the socially accepted means. Merton constructed a typology of individual responses to goals and means (Merton, 1938). The conformist type accepts the goal and means to attain the goal. The innovator accepts the goal, but rejects the means. This person will find a new way to meet the goal. The ritual type rejects the goal, but accepts the means. They may act like they are part of the team, but they do not care about the goal – going through the motions. The retreat type rejects the goal and the means. They might exhibit hermit-like behavior. Finally, the rebellious type not only rejects the goal and means, but also seeks substitutes. Instead of living the American dream, the rebellious type may join a commune. When an individual rejects a

goal, the means to achieve the goal or both, some form of deviance becomes likely (Merton, 1938).

Moral Career, Dramaturgical Analysis & Impression Management

While Erving Goffman is often associated with the “Chicago School” of sociology, he was more influenced by his Durkheimian mentor, W. Lloyd Warner. Upon completing his dissertation, Goffman went to work as an assistant at a mental health hospital. He published his observations and insights in a book titled, *Asylums, Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. One of the many ideas he developed during this time was the concept of “moral career” (Goffman, 1961). He broadly defined a career as “any social strand of any person’s course through life” (Goffman, 1961). He went on to describe a career as two-sided. One side is linked to internal matters such as self-image. The other side is linked to what he called an “official position” (Goffman, 1961). This definition “allows one to move back and forth between the personal and public, between the self and its significant society” (Goffman, 1961). A youth baseball coach’s career includes a personal role and a highly visible, public role in the community.

Goffman’s focus on the “moral” aspect of career meant to understand the “regular sequence of changes that career entails in the persons’ self and his framework of imagery for judging himself and others” (Goffman, 1961). Organizations like Little League rely on a sense of purpose and morals as a “social glue” to effectively operate. This is supported by rites described by Durkheim that “embody activities that weld the (slightly profane) world of routine business with the (institutionally sacred) realm of its

larger social purpose within the everyday life of the organization” (LaMagdeleine, 2016). Thus, youth baseball coaches learn and develop a sense of “right” and “wrong” behavior through an ongoing set of interactions and institutional expectations.

As he observed patients, Goffman recognized that the patient career consisted of three phases (Goffman, 1961): entering the hospital (pre-patient), being inside the hospital (inpatient) and being released from the hospital (ex-patient). Similarly, a volunteer coach enters the role after agreeing to become a coach. At this point, they begin their career by adapting to the institutional expectations of the league’s administrators. Finally, the coach exits the context. The concept of moral career will be a helpful way to understand the progressive nature of how a volunteer, parent coach develops and experiences their role.

Goffman most notably expanded Durkheim’s concepts by showing how “everyday social life features myth and ritual not unlike those that Durkheim studied in early tribal religion” (LaMagdeleine, 2016). As a result of his extension of Durkheimian theory to everyday life, Goffman’s theories of dramaturgical analysis and impression management can shed some light on parent coaching dynamics. In his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman suggests that social life is like a play (Goffman, 1959), with a stage, audience, actors and setting. In these terms, the setting for this research is a youth baseball “drama” scripted to feature two teams, dugouts, bases, chalk lines, a fence and a concession stand. The audience is typically parents sitting in the bleachers watching the primary actors play the game: kids and coaches. The game represents a “front stage” (Goffman, 1959) performance. Practices occur

“back stage” (Goffman, 1959). Some coaches, for instance, bring a kickball to practice to promote after formal practice fun. One coach even brought a sprinkler on a hot day for the last half hour of practice. This would never happen at a game. That is the performance, front stage. The back stage or practice behaviors are more private for the team. The language, jokes and general attitude is looser without the audience present.

There are a couple more important distinctions when it comes to coaches. According to Goffman, dramaturgy is a team effort: “A team has been defined as a set of performers who cooperate in presenting a single performance” (Goffman, 1959). It is not just the coach that is managing the performance. The coach is doing so in concert with the team members in an ongoing set of interactions. For example, a coach needs to manage practices in a way that kids are not complaining to their parents about favoritism. The entire team is part of this social system and how coaches effect results.

Goffman also suggests that the coach is the director of the performance. He states, “When we examine a team-performance, we often find that someone is given the right to direct and control the progress of the dramatic action. . . . Sometimes the individual who dominates the show in this way and is, in a sense, the director of it, plays an actual part in the performance he directs” (Goffman, 1959). He goes on to suggest two important roles of the director:

“First, the director may be given the special duty of bringing back into line any member of the team whose performance becomes unsuitable. Soothing and sanctioning are the corrective processes ordinarily involved Secondly, the director may be given the special duty of allocating the parts in the performance

and the personal front that is employed in each part, for each establishment may be seen as a place with a number of characters to dispose of to prospective performers and as an assemblage of sign equipment or ceremonial paraphernalia to be allocated” (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman depicted three defensive practices to ensure that a team successfully manages impressions (Goffman, 1959). The first is dramaturgical loyalty. This is a measure of the loyalty of each member of the team. In baseball, it would be loyalty between the coach and the kids. I remember when I was a kid, my dad went and complained to the coach about my playing time. This was very difficult for me. I had what Goffman calls a moral obligation to the coach (Goffman, 1959). The second practice is dramaturgical discipline. This is when an actor stays within the part and does not disclose back stage behaviors to the audience while on front stage. The third practice is dramaturgical circumspection which is about prevention. The team thinks about things that can go wrong with future performances. On the baseball field, this is when a ten year-old scolds the team by saying, “Everyone needs to get a good night sleep and show up for our game. We can’t win with eight guys!” As the director of the performance, the parent coach needs to effectively manage impressions and interactions with the team to deliver on front stage. Team loyalty, role discipline and foresight are key success factors.

Taxonomic Analysis

Unlike Durkheim and Goffman, Bruce Lincoln is not a sociologist but a history of religions scholar. In his book, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, he expands

Durkheim's work on collective representation, myth and ritual. Lincoln defines discourse as "the totality of signs, symbols, actions and texts; basically anything to communicate meaning" (Lincoln, 2014). He suggests that group discourse is an effective approach to self-regulation and he describes the power of mythic discourse as "the tyranny of taxonomy" (Lincoln, 2014). Taxonomy is defined as "a hierarchical, binary set of categories that depicts how the world is constructed . . . reinforce[ing] existing power relationships in the group even as it tells the collective story of the group in relation to other groups" (LaMagdeleine, 2016). This technique of classification is a helpful way to analyze discourse and construction in a youth sports context.

Schism

Lincoln describes the concept of schism as an instance of social deconstruction (Lincoln, 2014). He suggests that a schism is "a formal separation of two (or more) irreconcilable parties that had earlier been contending segments within one encompassing society" (Lincoln, 2014). This typically occurs due to a crisis or conflict due to a violations of the groups accepted norms. Those that challenged the group norms withdraw and form their own social group. This seriously weakens or even destroys the previous social group. With its mythic 1950s tradition, how would a Little League organization react to the concept of Traveling baseball? Lincoln's theory will be a helpful way to analyze the data.

CHAPTER TWO: Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

My research topic is focused on discovering how parent coaches think about their role and create an experience for participants in youth sports. As a qualitative researcher, I believe that my role is to conduct a study that “delves in depth into complexities and processes” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To do so, I needed to work in the environment for which the complexity exists, studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research methods helped me develop a detailed understanding of my research questions. According to Creswell, “This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature” (2013). Through in-depth interviews, I captured the rich stories of veteran parent coaches.

Youth baseball administrative processes include registration, evaluation, team assignments, scheduling and tournaments. Bogdan and Biklen suggest that “qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products” (2003). Some youth baseball processes are defined by a governing body such as Little League Headquarters. Other processes are defined at a regional or local level. How do processes affect parent coaches and the experience for kids? What is the impact on the community? Through qualitative research, I can collect descriptive data about these

process questions to uncover how participants “make sense of their lives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). An experimental model of research would not work as well for my study as a qualitative.

Methodological Framework: Symbolic Interactionism

I chose symbolic interactionism as the core methodological framework for my research because it is based on the assumption that “human experience is mediated by interpretation” (Blumer, 1969), and not the same for everyone, even among those who experience the same event. The tryout process in youth baseball, for example, theoretically meant something different for each participant in my study as a consequence of different experiences. Researchers from the Chicago School of sociology thought that “qualitative methodologies, especially those used in naturalistic observation, were best suited for the study of urban, social phenomena” (Lutters & Ackerman, 1996). The Chicago School refers to a group of sociologists at the University of Chicago who specialized in urban sociology. This group of researchers used symbolic interactionism as a framework combined with methods of field research such as grounded theory (Fine, 1995). Thus, I used the research techniques of Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman and Gary Fine. All are part of the Chicago School.

Grounded Theory Research

Anselm L. Strauss was also a Chicago School sociologist. He partnered with Barney Glaser to develop the grounded theory approach to qualitative research (Charmaz, 2006). I used this approach for my research. Phyllis Stern suggested that the “strongest case of the use of grounded theory is in investigations of relatively uncharted

water, or to gain a fresh perspective in a familiar situation” (1980). Creswell agrees that the literature may have models, but the models may not address the population of interest (Creswell, 2013). The literature on youth sports is abundant with research related to parent issues and coaching effectiveness. The complexity and implications of the parent coach role has not been well researched. The intent of grounded theory is to “move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory . . . a unified theoretical explanation for a process or an action” (Creswell, 2013). The assumption is that the participants have experience with the processes and that the “development of the theory might help explain practices or provide a framework for further research” (Creswell, 2013). As subject matter experts, the participants in my study understood and have experience with all components of the youth baseball process. Though in-depth interviewing, I generated theories of the parent coach experience which was shaped by the view of my participants (Creswell, 2013).

Case Research

One of the ways to design qualitative research is through a case study, which Bogdan and Biklen define as “a detailed examination of one setting . . . or one particular event” (2003). My research examined the setting of youth baseball in Sterling City, along with a schism event that created conflict in the community. This method is best suited for providing an in-depth understanding of a case, which helped me understand the history of the setting and the perspectives of the participants.

Bogdan and Biklen describe the general design of case research as a funnel. The wide end is the beginning of the study. This is when the researcher is “casting a wide

net,” looking for a subject or setting to study. Once a case is selected, the researcher begins collecting data, “continually modify[ing] the design and choos[ing] procedures as they learn more about the topic of study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Throughout the process, the researcher moves from “broad exploratory beginnings . . . to more directed data collection and analysis” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

As referenced earlier, Gary Fine was part of the Chicago School’s tradition of qualitative methodologies. In his book, *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture*, Fine used case research as a method and symbolic interactionism as a methodological framework. His data collection techniques included participant observation, interviews and surveys. Another example of using case research in the youth sports context is Clare Koch’s study, *The Adult Dramaturgy of Youth Hockey: The Myths and Rituals of the “Hockey Family.”* She also chose symbolic interactionism as a methodological framework. Like Fine and Koch, I chose the case study design to allow the collection and analysis of rich data, and to understand participant perspectives and the research setting.

Data Collection and Participation

I studied youth baseball in Sterling City, which is discussed shortly. Personally, I had been part of this context as a parent, coach and administrator for over ten years. In addition to interviews, my data set included over eight thousand emails that I saved over the years, newspaper articles, field notes, rosters and process documentation. Access to data and interview candidates provided me an “on the ground” view. My study focused on individual’s lived experience. It would be difficult to understand

human actions “without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to those actions – their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Research Setting

My data collection was conducted in what I term “Sterling City.” This setting meets the ideal criteria as set forth by Marshall & Rossman (1999):

“Entry is possible; there is a high probability that a rich mixture of the processes, people, programs, interactions and structure of interest are present; the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; and data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.”

This first ring suburb of a major metropolitan area formed as a village in the 1860s. Named after a local railroad, the village achieved the status of “City” in 1954. According to the United States Census Bureau, Sterling City grew significantly after World War II. The population grew from 7,737 in 1940 to 43,310 in 1960. The housing industry followed the population growth. Over 60% of the current homes in the city were built in the late 1940s and 1950s. To accommodate the number of kids, there were eleven elementary schools. The state’s first shopping center was built in Sterling City in the late 1940s to meet the need for consumer goods.

It was at this same time that Little League formed in Sterling City. According to the Sterling City Historical Society, a gentleman named Roger Thompson partnered with three other cities in 1951 to charter Little League organizations. Each city had one team

and all games were played at a make-shift playground. By 1955, Sterling City Little League expanded to eight teams. Roger worked tirelessly to build a ball park by soliciting donations from local companies. Sterling City Little League continued to grow. In the early 1970s there were three Little League charters defined by geography. According to Coach Greg, “Kids from the neighborhood would know each other because they went to church and school together” (personal communication, July 22, 2016). The three organizations were Sterling City Little League American, Sterling City Little League National and Sterling City Little League Central.

In the late 1970s, the city condemned the Central fields due to the detection of toxic waste created by a manufacturing company. This prompted Central to merge with American to form a new organization called Sterling City Little League South. National and South would coexist for the next twenty years. In 2001, The Sterling City Traveling Baseball Association formed and began operating as an alternative to Little League. Partly due to a demographic shift in the number of kids in the city, National and South merged in 2002 to form one Little League organization. While the total city population has been stable since the 1960s, the number of children decreased significantly, resulting in the closing of seven of the eleven elementary schools. The new organization is called Sterling City Little League and the current roster is slightly above four hundred kids between the ages of five and twelve. Another reason for the merger was to unify in response to the new threat of the Traveling organization. Since then, there has been conflict between the two leagues and the broader baseball community.

Participant Profiles

I conducted fifteen interviews with current and former parent coaches. The interview sample consisted of parent coaches who managed a team in Little League or Traveling - Figure 1. I selected coaches with over five years' experience in coaching and administrative roles. Six of the fifteen coaches held the role of President of Little League, Traveling or the Sterling City Baseball Association. All coaches were from Sterling City and had administrative experience with all aspects of the youth baseball process (e.g., tryouts, draft, scheduling, equipment & field maintenance). Participants did not receive compensation and were recruited with a personal phone call or email. Interviews and data from a pilot study conducted in June of 2015 have been included in the research.

Figure 1 - Participant Profiles

Coach	Experience		
	Little League	Traveling	High School / Legion
Adam	X	X	
Ryan	X		
Pete	X		
Tom	X	X	
Kent	X		
Ted	X	X	
Jim	X		
Mark	X		
Patrick	X		
Kirk	X		
Irwin	X	X	X
Greg	X		
Doug	X		
Scott	X	X	X
Paul	X		

My first interview was with Coach Adam. He grew up in Sterling City and met his wife at Sterling City High School. Adam has fond memories of playing baseball in Sterling City as a kid. He started in T-ball, played Little League in 1977 as a ten year old and then moved on to Babe Ruth. Adam coached his son for eleven years in both Sterling City Little League and Traveling baseball. He served various administrative roles including President of Little League and President of the Sterling City Baseball Association. Adam is deeply committed and nostalgic about his home town. As a member of the Sterling City community, he has served various leadership roles on non-profit boards and city government. As a parent coach in youth baseball, Adam kept his talented son in Little League, despite being constantly wooed by the Traveling organization. He wanted his son to have the same experience in Little League that he had in the 1970s. Adam believes that Little League is a better option for kids and has spent a great deal of time making Little League as competitive as Traveling.

As a small business owner, some coaches like Ryan sponsor a team. This financial commitment helps offset the costs of equipment and uniforms. Coach Ryan grew up in an urban location, met his wife in high school and chose to raise his family in Sterling City. He works for a family owned business in Sterling City and is well connected. As a kid, Ryan played baseball through the Majors level in Little League. Unlike many of his contemporary coaches, Ryan coached both a son and a daughter in baseball. Very few girls play youth baseball, which gave Ryan a different perspective. When I was in a leadership role in Little League, Ryan was a person that I could count for continuous improvement ideas. Based on this strength, I convinced him to serve as

President of Little League. Like Coach Adam, Ryan worked hard to make Little League as competitive as Traveling. I also partnered with Ryan to bring back the Sterling City Babe Ruth Association. This organization had merged with Traveling for kids between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. Ryan and I thought we needed a “recreational” option for kids. Overall, he coached both kids over a ten year period.

Coach Pete is known for being feisty and passionate. He works as a manager at a local university and lives in Sterling City. Of all the coaches that I have worked with, Pete is the most focused on fairness and consistency. Critical of the tryout and team selection processes, Pete partnered with Coach Kent to design a new process that reduced bias and improved parity across teams. He has been critical of the Traveling program as it relates to how kids are selected to participate. Pete calls it “checkbook baseball” as he believes parents are essentially buying an experience for their kid. Pete is altruistic in his approach. While not necessarily an expert on baseball, he is an effective communicator and relates well to both parents and kids. From an administrative standpoint, he worked as the Little League scheduler for a number of years.

Some coaches bring their professional talents to the baseball context. For example, Coach Tom’s analytical and data driven approach aligns to his profession in technology. It reminds me of the movie *Moneyball*. He keeps stats of each player and makes decisions about the line-up and field assignments based on the data. Most coaches make these decisions on instinct and observation. Like many parent coaches, Tom worries about showing favoritism to his sons. Tracking statistics mitigates this risk

for Tom as he can back up decisions in an objective manner. Tom coached his two sons over the course of nine years in both Little League and Traveling. We coached together for three seasons and became friends. His sons have had good experiences in each program and Tom believes that there is a role for both in Sterling City.

Coach Kent and I worked together when my younger son was twelve. We coached a team that finished in first place. He is the most ideal coach that I have met. Kent knows the game, recognizes and develops talent and relates well to both kids and their parents. I once asked my younger son to describe his favorite coach. He said, "Coach Kent, and . . . you dad." Kent coached his older son for six years in Sterling City Little League and is now coaching his younger son. Kent did not coach in Traveling, but supports both programs. However, given the higher commitment of Traveling, he does question the age and maturity for when kids should get serious about a sport. As a physician, he brings diagnostic skills to the baseball context and consistently identifies a way for each kid to contribute and feel valued. Kids absolutely love playing for Coach Kent.

Some coaches have a larger than life personality. That is Coach Ted. If you are watching a game that Ted is coaching, you can hear him chattering the whole game, talking to parents, umpires, players and parents. His laugh is contagious and as they say, "His bark is worse than his bite." Coach Ted met his wife at Sterling City High School and chose to raise his kids in Sterling City. He is deeply committed to his kids and has coached all three sons in baseball over the last fifteen years. He carefully manages his work schedule to allow time for coaching evenings and weekends. I coached against

Ted for a number of years and then we coached a Traveling team together when our kids were thirteen. We had a tough year with a record of five wins and twenty-two losses. The team was comprised of thirteen year olds that played Little League the previous year. They were not ready for that level of baseball, making both of us advocates for the Traveling program as an alternative development experience. Like Coach Scott, Ted is one of the few coaches in Sterling City that has coached all three kids in both Little League and Traveling. He endorses both programs. He believes that Little League is great for younger kids and for kids that are not as serious about baseball.

Coach Jim has over twenty years of coaching experience. He coached all four of his boys in Sterling City Little League. Jim is principal at a local elementary school. Previously, he was the principal of a high school. You would not know that Jim is highly educated and experienced if you watched him manage a game. With his playful and admittedly “loud” approach, he often seems like the 13th kid on the team. He loves kids and it is clear that he is having just as much fun as the team. Like Coach Pete, Jim has an altruistic approach to coaching. He wants to compete, but it is important to Jim how a team wins and losses. He values sportsmanship and has a difficult time with coaches, such as Coach Irwin, that may over leverage the rules for the sake of winning. Jim is a great communicator and treats all kids with respect. He has served numerous roles on baseball boards and prefers the community approach of Little League to Traveling. You can expect the kids on Jim’s team to have a good experience and come back the following year, regardless of the team’s record.

Of all the participants in this study, Coach Mark has the most experience as a baseball coach. He coached three boys over the course of twenty three years. Mark coached Sterling City teams in T-Ball, Little League, Babe Ruth, Traveling and Mickey Mantle. A lawyer by profession, he can unintentionally have the look of a litigator on his face when he coaches. This sometimes intimidates people. Of all the people that I have coached against, Mark is the most frustrating. He has a “Never Quit” philosophy that he instills in his team. On three occasions, my team was winning against Coach Mark only to lose in the last inning. During a Minors championship game, he was down by seven runs and won by scoring eight runs in the last inning. Mark is supportive of both Little League and Traveling programs as long as there is a place for every kid.

Coach Patrick is intense and reflective. He coached two boys over a ten year period. I think that his hands-on approach is an extension of his role in healthcare. My older son played for Patrick when he was twelve. At the parent meeting, he set the boundaries by saying, “The role of the coach is to coach. The role of the parent is to cheer and the role of the player is to play” (personal interaction, 2006). He told the parents that he was open to feedback behind the scenes vs. during a game. That team came in 1st place. Patrick’s older son was not that interested in baseball. His younger son played from age five until his senior year in high school. Patrick held numerous administrative roles including President of the Sterling City Baseball Association. He worked tirelessly to resolve the conflict between Little League and Traveling. Patrick supported both programs and wanted the city to unite around a common vision. He

was an ideal coach from the standpoint of relating to others, knowledge of the game and the ability to develop kids.

Non-parent coaches are rare in Sterling City Little League. Coach Kirk held this distinction. Over my tenure as a coach and an administrator in Sterling City, there were only two non-parent managers of a Majors level team. A self-described bureaucrat, Kirk was in charge of the rules. He would adapt the local rules to include changes at the Little League headquarters level. Kirk also worked with coaches to ensure that local rules balanced a competitive, fun experience for kids. It was also very important to Kirk that the scholarship fund had enough money to cover all kids that needed help with the registration fee. He was consistently the first donor every year. Kirk's game time style was loud and encouraging, often instructing players from the bench. He knew the game of baseball. While he did not have to worry about managing favoritism, I do think it was sometimes challenging for him to relate to the needs of parents.

As a technologist, Coach Irwin was an innovator. As a board member of Sterling City Little League, he created a new five and six year old program as an alternative to T-Ball. He also partnered with a consultant to design and implement a certification program for coaches. This significantly improved the knowledge and skills of the coach community. Irwin coached his son for six years in Sterling City Little League. He never worried about managing favoritism as he was one of the few coaches that did not over assess their own kid. Irwin now coaches his daughter's softball team. As I think about the characteristics of effective coaches, Irwin knew how to leverage the rules to

compete. As a competitor, he could exploit the weaknesses in the other team and find creative ways to win. Like Coach Kirk, his style was loud and encouraging.

We called Coach Greg the “historian.” At 89 years old, he coached both of his sons in Sterling City Little League in the 1970s. One of his teams won the state tournament. Greg served on the Sterling City Little League board for twenty years after his kids stopped playing. Now he watches two of his grandsons play Little League in Sterling City. I had a chance to visit Greg at his home. He showed me a wall full of Little League pictures in his basement. He had team and tournament pictures in chronological order. During our visit, he shared an article with me that had run in the local newspaper. The article highlighted the “Greg Johnson” tournament, which was named after him. Twenty years ago, he was frustrated that most of the teams participated in an end of season tournament, except the last place teams. That was his idea – a year end tournament throughout the district whereby all the last place teams were invited. It was a hit. The idea of Traveling confuses Greg. He does not understand why kids would need to leave Sterling City to play baseball. He prefers the Little League model.

Coach Doug had an interesting mix of experience. He coached his son and daughter. He served as the Little League President and then became an umpire. Doug then managed the umpire crew for about eight years following his term as President. There is a large drop off in baseball participation between the ages of twelve and thirteen. Yet, some of the kids still love the game. That is the group of kids that Doug recruited for umpire roles. He worked hard to protect his crew from the harsh criticism of parents and coaches. As a high school teacher, Doug related well to this age group.

His perspectives on favoritism and coach types is from the view of an umpire. He watches coaches in between innings and during games struggle to manage many of the subtleties of the role. Doug also has interesting perspective on the capabilities of Little League and Traveling. Doug's evaluation of the two programs is from behind the plate. He clearly sees a higher level of talent in Traveling and he supported the creation of the Traveling program in 2001. Given his steady and principled approach, I have witnessed Doug eject coaches from games due to a lack of respect or sportsmanship.

Sterling City was fortunate to have Coach Scott as one of the youth baseball coaches. He has coached three kids in both Little League and Traveling. Of all the participants in the study, he has the most overall baseball experience. He played Little League, high school and college baseball. In addition, he has experience as a high school baseball coach. As an elementary school teacher, the baseball context is a classroom for Scott as he recognizes each kid's talent and meets them in a place that enables skill development. Scott's approach is a blend of soft-spoken charisma and steady leadership. He is what I would describe as an ideal coach. He knows the game, can develop kids and is great with parents. As the President of the Sterling City Traveling Association, Scott is working hard to build a bridge with Sterling City Little League. He has a vision for a single association for baseball. I have the utmost respect for Coach Scott and his ability to bring people together.

Quick to action and direct, Coach Paul played Little League as a kid and coached his two boys in Sterling City. When he was not coaching, we used to call him the "4th wheel" as he would help with scoring the game, announcing or acting as a base coach.

If you ever needed help, you could count on Paul. He was deeply committed to the Little League experience as he saw Little League as an extension of the community. While he partnered with the Traveling folks to operate as one city, he made sure that items such as field usage & maintenance, supplies and concessions were fairly shared between the organizations. He fought hard to keep the talent in Little League and leveraged loyal relationships with parents to retain players. One of Paul's most pointed critiques of Traveling was that they were "going nowhere fast" (personal interaction, July 30, 2016). He felt that having kids as young as eight years old play Traveling was putting too much pressure on the kid. An eight year old may be the best player at his age level. Five years later, given the variability of puberty and interests, the kid may not even be playing. Paul served as the Little League President for two years and directed the Greg Johnson tournament.

Interviewing Procedure

I began each interview by reviewing the consent form and questions, asking the participant questions to confirm their understanding of the research purpose and confidentiality. Once the interviewer was comfortable and all questions had been answered, the consent form was signed and the interview began. Copies of the consent form were produced for the participant and the researcher. The interviews were 60-90 minutes in length and took place at my home, the participant's home or a local coffee shop. Using a semi-structured interview approach, I probed for emerging insights. Additional follow-up and questions were handled on an as needed basis.

Data Analysis

Crabtree and Miller (1992) describe a continuum of data analysis strategies. At one end are the prefigured technical strategies and at the other end are the emergent intuitive strategies. A researcher utilizing the prefigured technical approach determines the categories for analyzing data in advance; whereas, a researcher utilizing the emergent intuitive approach does not. For my study, I used the emergent intuitive approach, which is consistent with both the symbolic interactionism and grounded theory approaches. In particular, I emphasized “Observer Comments” and notes to self that facilitate using one’s experiences (and interpretations of them) to better understand the new data. Chapter three is an extended example of this reflective approach to understanding new data. I did not want to prescribe the implications of the parent coach experience. Instead, I relied on my intuitive and interpretive abilities.

As a grounded theory study, I used open, axial and selective coding. I interviewed until I saturated “the categories—to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained did not provide further insight into the category” (Creswell, 2013). I coded the data immediately following interviews. Emergent understandings were tested and challenged. I looked for alternative understandings of the data and connections between interviews.

Personal Bias

My interest in this topic arose from the years that I was involved with youth baseball. As a kid, I had fond and regrettable memories of playing organized baseball.

As a parent, I have coached two sons over the course of ten years. I understand the challenges of being a parent coach and my experience has formed the opinion that the coach is an integral part of the experience for kids. As a qualitative researcher, I recognized the role I play as the key instrument in this study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) and the resulting responsibility I have to understand and expose my bias and perspective. As a former parent coach and administrator, I interviewed participants with similar backgrounds. While my personal involvement in the institution of youth baseball has depth, I was not involved in the administration of baseball in Sterling City during the study. I constantly challenged myself to not let my viewpoint cloud what I heard from the participants. Throughout the study, I worked closely with my dissertation chair to be aware of my personal biases and I consistently exposed my personal biases to ensure that they did not threaten the research.

Limitations & Delimitations

This study is specific to the context of youth baseball in Sterling City. The data is not generalizable in a statistical sense (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Findings may be transferable to those who coach youth sports. Analyses were framed within the Durkheim tradition of sociology.

Delimitations are the boundaries I have set for the study. Because this is qualitative research and requires in-depth data gathering, I chose to interview parent coaches. For the purposes of a clear timeframe, this study occurred in 2015-2016. I worked with a small purposeful sample (Creswell, 2013) where the participants of the study were selected to illustrate various perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Bogdan and Biklen describe ethics in research as “the principles of right and wrong that a particular group accepts at a particular time” (2003). This includes ensuring that informants were voluntarily engaged in the research, understood the obligations and were not exposed to risks that outweigh the gains. In addition, the University of Saint Thomas has an institutional review board (IRB) to ensure that research is conducted according to ethical standards.

To ensure confidentiality, I locked all recordings, documents and transcripts in a locked cabinet in my home office. Transcripts are secured at Rev.com. My dissertation chair and I have sole access to the data. Email transmissions between us have been encrypted. I also used pseudonyms to protect participants, city and institutional identities. Details have been slightly altered in some cases to ensure protection of individual privacy.

CHAPTER THREE: The Moral Career of a Little League Coach

My baseball story began in the late 1970s when I was nine years old. I participated in Little League for four years, three at the Minors level and one at the Majors level. I was one of the best players when messing around with my friends in the backyard or sandlot, yet struggled with the performance of a game. Then something interesting happened. My grandparent's visited from New York. My grandpa took me to Kmart to get a batting glove, something that I really wanted. That night we had a game. There were two runners on base and it was my turn to bat. As I stood in the batter's box, I looked at my grandpa in the stands and smiled. I swung as hard as I could at the next pitch and hit a line drive to the fence. As I ran to third base, the ball got by the fielder. My coach yelled at me to keep running and I slid safely into home plate. It was an inside the park home run. After that at bat, I hit .500 for the rest of the year. One glove, one swing and I had instant confidence. As a coach, I have observed the correlation between confidence and results. Kids with confidence play well and overcome slumps. I have seen this in my own kids as well. Ideal coaches nurture the confidence of kids, positively affecting their performance.

After four years of Little League, I played two years of Babe Ruth as a thirteen and fourteen year old. Of the coaches I had over the six years, I cannot remember four of them. I can remember the best one and the worst one. Coach Brown was a nice guy. He took us to Dairy Queen at the end of the season and he was by far my most positive coach, a very encouraging gentleman that did not care too much about winning. It was a fun year with Coach Brown and it was my best year. I cannot remember the name of

the worst coach, but I can see him in my mind's eye. I once asked him for help hitting and he said that he did not have time. He just sat on the bench and barked at kids – a real curmudgeon. I bet that no one else wanted the job and he was enlisted at the last minute. He did not develop kids or manage the relationships of the team. One time, I walked up to the plate to bat and a teammate said, "Get a hit for once." The coach laughed. Halfway through the season I stopped going to baseball. That was the end of my baseball career.

My career as a youth baseball coach followed Erving Goffman's phases of a "moral career" (Goffman, 1961). I began in 2004 (entry) when I was recruited to be an assistant coach. Over the next ten years (being in the role), I learned how to coach as a result of interactions and the institutional expectations of Little League. Once my kids were no longer playing baseball, I retired (exit). In the beginning, I was naïve and had what I would call "ill equipped good intentions." I agreed to the role as a way to contribute to the community and spend time with my two sons. Since I played baseball, I did not think that coaching would be too difficult. I knew the game as a former player and a fan. The rapport that I had with my kids and their friends was good. Surely I could engage a team and facilitate a positive experience. While the actual experience was much different than what I anticipated, "Coach Rich" was a gratifying role. As I reflect back to my time as a coach, I think about the challenge of becoming a coach, the insights and lessons learned, and the social reality of a youth baseball team.

Becoming a Coach

I intentionally use the verb “becoming” when I describe my coaching journey in youth sports. The coaches I talked to in this study reminisced about their ignorance at the beginning of their journey and their expertise at the end. I remember my first day as a coach in Sterling City Little League. My good friend Angel and I co-managed a Minors team sponsored by a local gas station. I will never forget the anticipation of our first practice. I was excited to begin facilitating a fun, competitive experience for the kids. Angel said, “Why don’t you pitch batting practice and I will work with the pitchers?” Sounded good to me. He walked away with one kid and I had the other eleven kids staring blankly at me. I said, “Go take a position and you (pointing to the kid closest to me) grab a bat.” I then watched the kids fight over positions. After about ten minutes of throwing batting practice, one of the mothers asked, “Are you going to have the catcher wear a face mask?” How embarrassing! The practice was a free-for-all. We won half our games that year and the kids seemed to have a good time. The following year, there were four ten year olds drafted to the Majors level. It was unusual at that time for a ten year old to play in the Majors. Three of those kids had been on our team. Six years later, those three kids started on the high school baseball team. Two played in college. From a talent perspective, Angel and I had the best team. Perhaps, if they did not have rookie coaches, that team would have won the end of season tournament. We were nice and everyone came back the next year for more, but I doubt they learned much about baseball. As I developed into a more competent coach, I had to learn how

to balance competition & fun, build a competitive team, and navigate the relationships between players and their parents.

The outcomes of fun and competition are reflected in the general narrative of youth sports. However, there is rarely a recommendation on “how” to achieve both objectives. One of my favorite years as a coach in Sterling City was when my younger son, Anthony, was nine years old. The team was sponsored by a local insurance agent. There was one kid on the team that was going to quit because he did not make the Majors level. He was so upset that he tore down the baseball posters in his room. I talked to him and sold him on the idea that he would be a leader on the team and that I needed his help for the team to be successful. He decided to play and had a very good season. That team won about seventy percent of the games and made it to the quarter finals of the end of season tournament. The chemistry between the kids, parents and coaches was optimal. How did I contribute to building this experience? I think it was due to the coaches never taking the game too seriously. We took what I would call an altruistic approach to the game, focusing on the objectives of sportsmanship, positive experiences and the overall idea that “life is bigger than this season of baseball.” I treasure the signed baseball from that team, given to me at the end of season party.

What if our objective had been to win the end of season tournament? To achieve this objective, we would have focused on winning as many games as possible in order to get a good seeding. How would this have changed the experience for the kids? I will never know for that team, however, I do know for another team. When Anthony was ten, he played for a Majors level team sponsored by a fraternal organization. The

team I inherited as a coach had been in first place the previous year with many returning players. This team had talent. I changed my approach to focus on winning more than the experience. We won half the games and significantly underachieved. The problem was that I did not really understand the game of baseball. I was good at developing skills and relating to parents. My communication and team organization skills were often recognized. Competing and balancing a fun experience also require knowledge of the game and how to leverage the rules. It can be difficult for an altruistic coach like me to win at a competitive level. Thus, one of my challenges of becoming a coach was to learn how to balance the objectives of competition and fun, within the framework of my altruistic coach type.

Another challenge for me was learning the operational processes of Little League – in particular the tryout and draft processes. When I first participated in tryouts, I had a score sheet and the task was to rate each kid on skills such as fielding, hitting and throwing. That evening, the coaches met in a room at the local recreation center and drew names out of hat to determine the draft order. I got number seven. When it was my turn, I selected a kid that I thought had potential. The room was quiet. I was self-conscious that I must have made a mistake. It became clear to me that the success of a team is dependent on a coach's ability to assess, acquire and develop talent. The Little League operating manual describes the options for conducting a draft. However, there was little information or guidance for me on how to draft. As I kept coaching, I got better. When Anthony was twelve I drafted a team that finished in first place. I do not

remember developing skills so much that year. We put the kids in the right position and watched them compete.

Dealing with parents did not meet the stereotype I had in mind. I assumed that there would be a few difficult parents that would be disrespectful and yell at me. I could handle that. What was more difficult was navigating the relationship between a parent and their child. I once coached a diminutive kid named Chris who was an excellent shortstop. I made a connection with Chris and he developed a sense of loyalty to me. At the end of the year, the Traveling organization began recruiting Chris for the following season. His dad was thrilled and pushed him to leave Little League for Traveling. I asked him what he was going to do and I could see that he was torn by loyalty to his dad and loyalty to me. I told Chris, "You are a great kid and a great player. I want you to do what is best for you. Both options are good. Also, I know the Traveling coach. He is a great guy!" He chose Traveling to please his dad. The bottom line is that this kid did not like baseball. He eventually quit. He only played to please his dad. At first, I was not prepared to be in the middle of family dynamics. The more I coached, the better I developed the skill to recognize and facilitate mutually beneficial solutions for both parents and their kids.

Insights and Lessons Learned

I am so grateful for the opportunity to coach both my sons. The moments were filled with angst, joy and sometimes lingering regret. I know my boys learned a lot about life by participating in youth baseball. What surprises me is how much I learned about myself by being their coach. My older son Alex played baseball for seven years,

two of which I was his coach. Anthony played baseball for ten years, nine of which I was his coach.

It was after Alex quit baseball that he taught me an important lesson. The seed was planted during a year that I was his coach. He was in a division called Classic Minors, comprised of three teams. This division was created for older kids that needed additional development. We did not play games on Saturday, which made this league an option for those in the Jewish community that could not play baseball after sun down on Friday or Saturday. The team was sponsored by a service organization. One of Alex's friends on the team was another kid named Alex. His dad was one of the assistant coaches. After the season, the two Alex's drifted apart for about four years. My Alex would go on to play baseball through fourteen year old Babe Ruth. He eventually lost interest and replaced baseball with swimming. In my mind, he was going to play high school baseball when he was six years old. As his interest waned, I got frustrated. I never saw swimming in the picture. He joined as a sophomore and reconnected with his friend Alex from the baseball team. By the time they graduated, their relay team went to state and they both achieved all-conference honors. The "baseball dream" for Alex was my dream, not his. Who knew that a kid would change their mind and join a different sport? We also had different objectives. As an achievement oriented person, I wanted my son to compete and develop into a great baseball player. He just wanted to play with his friends, regardless of the sport. It took me a long time to recognize this misplaced expectation.

I also learned a number of insights from coaching Anthony. He started playing t-ball when he was four. His first Little League experience was at the age of six on a team sponsored by a local restaurant. This was a machine pitch (instead of kid pitch) league focused more on development than competition. I coached the team with Coach Tom. It was a great experience and I am still friends with him almost twelve years later. Developing adult friendships has been one of the joys of coaching.

Anthony played machine pitch again the following year for a team sponsored by a service organization. After coaching six to eight year olds for a few years, I began to categorize parents into three groups. The first was the apathetic group. They rarely showed up for games and did not care how well their child performed. The second was the balanced group. They focused on the well-being of their child, managing self-esteem and helping the kid interpret the experience. The third was the Joe Mauer group. These parents believed that their kid was going to be a professional baseball player. Each group presented unique challenges. The apathetic group usually did not let you know when they were going miss a game or practice. The Joe Mauer group would pull you aside after a game and discuss playing time and other development opportunities. The balanced group was the normal distribution. They kept you sane and made sure that you could field a team each week. The balanced group would buy me a gift certificate at the end of the season or write me a note about how much they appreciated my efforts. While this is not a perfect typology, I did use these distinctions early in my youth coaching career to customize my approach. Today, as I meet Joe

Mauer parents, I give them advice which usually begins with, “You never know if your kid will be a swimmer”

A few years later, Anthony made the Majors level and played for a team sponsored by a fraternal organization. He was one of only a handful of ten year olds to play at this level. The primary reason he played in the majors was due to the need for me to be a coach. The idea was that I could take a team and coach it for three years in a row. Should Anthony have been in the Majors? As I look back, I wish that he had stayed in Minors another year. He could have played with his friends, had more playing time and developed at the position(s) of his choice. As a ten year old in the Majors, he did not play much and did not play with his friends. He did make the all-star team. It was generally believed that a ten year old in the Majors was better than a ten year old in the Minors. It was a status symbol of sorts, but not a good decision. Most of my memories about this particular year were about Anthony not being ready for the level of competition. I now believe that this decision was more about me than him.

As a twelve year old, Anthony played his last year in Sterling City Little League. I co-managed the team with Coach Kent. Anthony readily admits that Coach Kent was his favorite coach because he was nice and encouraging. Anthony pitched, played infield and outfield, and hit over .500 throughout the season. He batted third and made the all-star team. The highlight of the season is when Anthony hit a home run over the fence. I will never forget the ball coming off the bat and whispering to myself, “Go over, go over, go over” As a parent coach, I learned a great deal that season about coaching and my son. The team culture was built on encouragement. We came in first

place and I will readily admit that it was Coach Kent that made this possible. While Coach Kent and I were supportive and encouraging in our approach, the Minor level team that achieved first place that year had what I would describe as an exploitive approach. This coach fully leveraged rules to win even if it pushed the limits of sportsmanship and created a culture of fear. His team and our team both did well using different approaches. However, were kids on both teams having fun? To answer this question, I assessed retention. Every kid from our team played the following year. Three fourths of the kids on the minor level team quit baseball. Regardless of the competitive outcome, these kids were not having fun.

Anthony had now graduated from Little League. I had a few regrets when I reflected about our relationship. One of my “moral career” regrets was how I managed favoritism. It was important to me that other parents did not think that I favored Anthony and that he received special treatment. Unfortunately, I chose to approach this by making an example of him to prove that I was fair. If kids were cutting up in practice or even a game, I would say, “Anthony, get your head in the game!” This would bring the entire team to attention. I was not comfortable publicly yelling at another kid, but did take actions to ensure that other parents never said, “Coach Rich favors his kid.”

After Little League, Anthony moved to Traveling baseball and played at the AA level. This is the middle tier of competition. AAA is the highest level and A is the lowest level. Initially, we were going to field an A level team, but a group of dads convinced the league to play at a higher level. I went along with it and helped coach the team. What a mistake. Our record was five wins and twenty-two losses. The boys and coaches were

not ready for the level of play. Anthony did not connect with the other coaches and did not perform well. He almost quit and had the worst attendance on the team. His best games were when his grandparents visited. It was amazing. He would miss a week of games and practices and then get three hits and make a bunch of plays because his family was watching. We played in four weekend tournaments that year. One weekend, we had three games in a city about twenty miles from home. The first game was in the morning. We drove home eleven hours later. I told Anthony, "Hey, just being honest, I did not enjoy today. This was too much baseball for me as a coach. I do not think that I want to do this again." He felt the same way. We agreed that we both did not want this much baseball. We enjoyed the game itself, the social component and getting outside during the summer. As a coach, I learned what I would call a cultural lesson. I am convinced that we put that team together and played at the wrong level to make a small group of parents feel good about themselves. These kids did not make the most competitive team and this was a way to save face. I even fell into the rationalization, which was a wake-up call. The idea that in some way, decisions about kids are made based on the self-esteem and social status of parents vs. what is best for the kids.

This was not my first interaction with Traveling baseball. When Anthony was ten, he had an opportunity to be on a Traveling team. I was President of Sterling City Little League and was dedicated to ensuring that the program was successful. It would have been hard for me to walk away from this commitment. We talked about it and Anthony decided to stay in Little League. A year later, Anthony joined a Traveling fall

ball team. This brand of baseball was more competitive and it was a great opportunity for Anthony to develop. He attended two practices and then quit. He said, "That is just not my thing." He struggled with the level of play, did not fit within the social structure of the team and was not having fun.

As an administrator, I worked hard to reconcile the ongoing conflict between the Sterling City Little League and Traveling baseball associations. The most difficult part of the relationship was competing for a small group of players so that both organizations could thrive. The resulted in discourse and narratives that "sold" each program to parents as the best choice for their kid. For me, it was never the right choice for my sons given the participative nature of their involvement in baseball. The origin and evolution of the conflict will be explored in the next chapter.

Social Reality of a Youth Baseball Team

One of the teams I coached had two girls, the only two girls in the league that year. On that same team, I had two brothers who had two sets of parents. One kid had two moms. Another kid was being raised by his grandparents. Two families observed Saturday as their Sabbath and could not participate in baseball from Friday sundown until Sunday morning. The myth of the traditional American family (Coontz, 1992) was reflected in only minority of the team. Transportation was an issue for three of the kids due to their parents working multiple jobs. From a socioeconomic stand point, the team ranged from "free and reduced lunch" for three kids to parents who held executive roles at large companies. One of the brothers once asked me, "Coach, will I be on your team next year?" My answer was pragmatic. I told him that it may happen, but due to the

process of tryouts and team assignments, it was like a coin toss. A week later, the same kid was getting up to bat and in an effort to motivate him, I used a *Star Wars* reference. I said, "Do you remember when Luke and Yoda were trying to raise the ship from the swamp?" He looked at me with confusion and a little embarrassment as he had never seen *Star Wars*. At the next game, while he was sitting in the dug-out, he was reading a *Star Wars* book. It occurred to me that I had made a connection with this kid. I later found out that his parents were going through a tough divorce and that I was a key male figure in his life. When he asked if he would be on my team the following year, he may have been looking for grounding and continuity, not for my ability to develop skills. As a coach, I did not anticipate that a Little League team would so dramatically reflect multiple aspects of society.

My most significant Little League experiences were related to scholarships. Each season, Sterling City Little League advertised registration and put a footnote at the bottom of the page: scholarships available upon request. Back then we had in-person registration. Parents would ask someone about scholarships and they would be directed to me. Some people were matter of fact, some cried and some told me every detail of their situation. I accepted all the requests, which added pressure to the scholarship fund and required additional fundraising. Some board members were self-righteous about scholarships, demanding that people apply and get approval. I never agreed with this approach. However, after three to four years of involvement, some of the requests were from the same people each year, families that had resources. I had one mother demand a scholarship and drive away in a high end automobile. It was

frustrating that a few parents like this mother could negatively define a narrative and impact those that really needed help. I was humbled to learn that some people needed as little as twenty dollars for their kids to participate. That is less than what my family spends on concessions when we go to a movie.

Another key event in my coaching journey occurred when Anthony was fourteen. We were driving to another city for a night game. As we were driving, I saw an orange blur on the side of the road. As we got closer, I saw that it was a kid running with a baseball glove. Anthony said, "Dad, I think that is Carlos!" Carlos's parents worked multiple jobs and he had a hard time getting a ride to games. He absolutely loved baseball and wanted to be at every game and practice. We pulled over and yelled for him to cross the street and get into the car. I told Carlos to call me if he ever needed a ride. The distance between his house and the field was seven miles. This experience impacted my son more than me. It is one thing to know that people struggle with resources. It is another thing to be brought into their world and to the realization of inequity.

My youth baseball career began as a player at the age of nine and ended thirty-five years later when I coached a fifteen year old Babe Ruth team. The journey included coaching eleven regular season and three all-star teams. I held numerous administrative roles including treasurer, President and player agent. As a parent coach, I eventually learned how to balance competition and fun, recognizing that my altruistic approach needed to be complemented by a coach that knew the game of baseball. Most important, I learned about my kids, myself and the implications of being their

coach. One of my proudest accomplishments during my tenure in Sterling City Baseball was working cooperatively with the Traveling organization my last two years. For thirteen to fifteen year olds, we held joint tryouts. We built competitive (Traveling) teams with the top talent and developmental (Babe Ruth) teams with those kids that wanted a recreational experience or needed further development. My great regret is not finding common ground for ten to twelve year olds.

CHAPTER FOUR: Contesting the Nature of Youth Baseball

Parents choosing a youth baseball program is a recent phenomenon in Sterling City. For almost fifty years, Little League was the only option. Originating in 1952, Sterling City Little League developed as a community based, participative model of youth sports. In 2001, a new organization called the Sterling City Traveling Baseball Association began operating as an alternative to Little League. The two organizations would not only provide a choice for a competitive game, but would also begin competing for talent. The ensuing fight for players is similar to two companies fighting for customers, differentiating their product and service through promotion and loyalty programs. Customers make a choice based on many factors including location, word-of-mouth and previous experience. Youth baseball in Sterling City could now be thought of as a product. The focus of this chapter is to review and analyze the evolution of these two organizations, and how taxonomic narratives reflect the symbolic criteria parent-consumers use to make a choice.

Evolution of Two Competing Organizations

Little League and 1950s Values

Sterling City Little League evolved as a program reflecting 1950s values, specifically focusing on family and community, not solely a competitive brand of baseball. At the origin of Sterling City Little League, lifestyle for many Americans was improving. However, it is estimated that “25 percent of Americans, forty to fifty million people, were poor in the mid-1950s, and [with] the absence of food stamps and housing programs – [the] poverty was searing” (Coontz, 1992). In addition, “a third of American

children were poor” (Coontz, 1992) at the end of the 1950s. Having grown up during the depression, the Sterling City Little League founder, Roger Thompson was deeply committed to kids having access to community parks and baseball fields. He also made sure that no kid would be turned away from Little League due to lack of money or resources. This commitment is still part of the fabric of the organization over sixty years later. I remember a heated board discussion about increasing the registration fee by five dollars. One side pointed to the challenge of financing the league and the other side represented the families that struggled with the expense. We decided to focus on fund raising instead of increasing the fee. For those families that could not afford the registration fee, scholarships were provided.

In addition to scholarship donations, annual Little League operating costs are offset by the financial sponsorships of local business, fraternal and service organizations. These team sponsors provide money for uniforms and equipment. A local mall and a bank have been continuous sponsors of Sterling City Little League since 1952, sometimes supporting two teams a year. There is a tradition of players proudly wearing a jersey of a local restaurant, insurance agent or grocery store. That continues to be how kids identify with their team and the community of Little League.

Culture of Competition & Privatization

From 1952 to 2001, Little League essentially had a civic, “government services” monopoly on the youth baseball market in Sterling City. It did not face competition for its services. Competition is inherent to the game of baseball, whereby two teams compete for the highest score. In a broader sense, competition is inherently valued in

the United States capitalist system. That is one reason that the government regulates commerce and the potential impact of monopolies. Competition exists in other domains such as students competing for scholarship money and acceptance to highly selective colleges and universities. Politicians compete in elections. Companies compete for employee talent. Today's youth not only engage in outdoor sports such as baseball, but also compete in online video games. Competition is also a key component of the "privatization" trend which emerged in the 1980s. The idea is that competition between the private and public sector would result in better, more efficient services.

How could these trends impact youth sports? Given that Little League evolved in the image of a government services organization, it was ripe for the threat of privatization. In an increasingly competitive culture, a small group of parents in Sterling City had become highly dissatisfied with the participative, non-competitive nature of Little League. When they formed the Sterling City Traveling Baseball Association in 2001, Little League no longer had a monopoly as the two organization overlapped for kids between the ages of ten and twelve. The two leagues would resemble what Durkheim referred to as mechanical and organic societies. Members of a mechanical society (Little League) focused on the "common good," while members of an organic society (Traveling), "specialize in their roles and are rewarded based on merit" (Durkheim, 1873 [1964]). Many Traveling leagues now emphasize year round involvement in a single sport, fully developing skills in a specific position. By introducing a new program in Sterling City, the founders of Traveling had, in effect, introduced a "privatized" form of youth baseball.

Schism Story in Sterling City

The idea of Traveling baseball in Sterling City began as a discussion at a Little League board meeting in the summer of 2000. One board member, coach Dusty, requested to take a group of kids to participate in weekend tournaments. He wanted to work with a group of the most skilled ten year olds, including his son. Dusty believed that the best way to develop his son was to have him “compete at the highest level of competition,” which he believed could not be achieved in the Little League participative model. The Little League President and other board members unequivocally declined the request, saying that Traveling to other communities to play baseball and this level of extreme talent differentiation did not align to the community-oriented mission of Little League.

Coach Doug was President of Sterling City Little League South a few years earlier. He remembers that “there was tension between Traveling as a notch above the participation baseball which Little League had become. Good players weren't getting a chance to compete at a high enough level” (personal communication, July 25, 2016). He said that the “rhetoric was they're taking the best players out of Little League, but Little League was at the same time, becoming more of a participation game” (personal communication, July 25, 2016). Dusty decided to form the Traveling team without permission. He and his assistant coach were subsequently kicked off the board. That was the day when one organization became two organizations. While the schism weakened Sterling City Little League for years to come, there is no evidence that the board attempted to look for alternatives or compromise.

Many coaches on both sides of the Little League vs. Traveling schism were foggy about the reason for the schism. Coach Kirk did not remember who started Traveling, but said that “they were legendary people who were dyed in the wool [Little League] and then something happened and their people went to something else. The battle lines were drawn. In some ways . . . it meant more choices for parents and kids for baseball” (personal communication, May 14, 2016). Other coaches, like Coach Adam, suggest that the two programs are simply different:

“Yeah, so the people who chose to go play Traveling baseball with their kids were doing it because they didn’t think Little League was a good brand of baseball for whatever reason. They thought that the travel model was a better model. The people who stayed with Little League thought it was a better model. There are two different models, so when you look at them independently, one isn’t necessarily better than the other, they’re just different” (personal communication, April 30, 2015).

However, Coach Pete thinks it’s more about superiority:

“The struggle is between those two groups saying, ‘We’re better than you, screw you,’ when really they’re just different. One’s not better than the other, they’re different. If people could come to that realization and choose on that basis instead of ‘my kid's better he’s going to go play travel because he’s better than all the kids in Little League.’ That’s what I was trying to prove wrong, by having my kid play Little League because I didn’t believe it and I still don’t to this day” (personal communication, June 6, 2015).

Coach Kirk agreed with this assessment:

“If you have an inferiority complex on this side and a superiority complex on the other side, that’s natural conflict. Then the inferiority complex folks are going to resent that much more when the superiority complex people are that much more apathetic and just be like, ‘Hey.’ Especially if they were born and raised in the Little League mold and then broke off. Of course, there’s going to be that tension. It’s like a civil war. We all start it out as advocates of youth baseball, but then there was a faction that rose up and revolted and now is by most or all accounts doing pretty well, relative to its motherland” (personal communication, May 14, 2016).

Another way to look at the schism is through Robert Merton’s theory of social strain (Merton, 1938). He suggests that society defines goals for which individuals should aspire and the means to achieve the goals. Social strain happens when an individual cannot achieve the goal via the socially accepted means. That is what happened to Coach Dusty. In his typology of social strain, Merton described the rebellious type. This type would reject the goals and means, and look for substitutes. Instead of continuing with Little League, Coach Dusty rebelled and created the substitute of Traveling baseball. Coach Doug has been involved with Sterling City baseball for over fifteen years. He served as a coach, board President and umpire and remembers the split as a somewhat heroic act:

“There probably were deep wounds, and I don’t know how else Dusty could have done it. You and I are too nice. We wouldn’t have been able to pull it off. I think

if you look at any aspect of any history of any size, a big change like that takes a rebel and there's feelings hurt" (personal communication, July 25, 2016).

The mission, purpose and goals of each organization, along with historical myths, rituals and discourse resulted in new narratives for each program, setting up a symbolic choice for parents.

Mission, Purpose & Goals

Both organizations are non-profit and community-oriented. On its web site, Sterling City Little League states their mission: "Sterling City Little League is a non-profit organization run by volunteer parents. Our mission is to provide a safe environment where children can learn and play the game of baseball. We will accomplish this by focusing on player and coach development, providing superior communication and creating a level playing field where all children can compete and have fun." In addition, Sterling City Little League describes its purpose as promoting team play while generating fun:

"Developing all ball players by stressing the basic baseball fundamentals and appropriate attitudes towards events on the field and towards team play. More importantly, Little League should be FUN! The aim is to work towards being a competitive team rather than to win at all costs. Each player, at all levels, will be treated as fairly as possible within the substitution rule of Little League baseball and in consideration of his or her abilities."

On its web site, the Sterling City Traveling Baseball Association describes its purpose as skill development:

“Traveling Baseball organizes baseball teams for baseball players living in [Sterling City] or attending school in the [Sterling City] School District. Our goal is to create a comprehensive, community-based program to support the development of players across a wide range of participation levels. Our ultimate vision is to foster consistent teams at the youth level to support our High School and Legion teams.

The Traveling Baseball program goals are as follows:

- Provide effective, high quality training for players and coaches at all levels.
- Provide programs that are cooperative with, and respected by other community programs.
- Seek to maximize the potential of every player in the program.
- Encourage and foster player participation for the full length of a player’s youth sports career by putting them in a position for success.
- Emphasize the importance of teamwork and sportsmanship.”

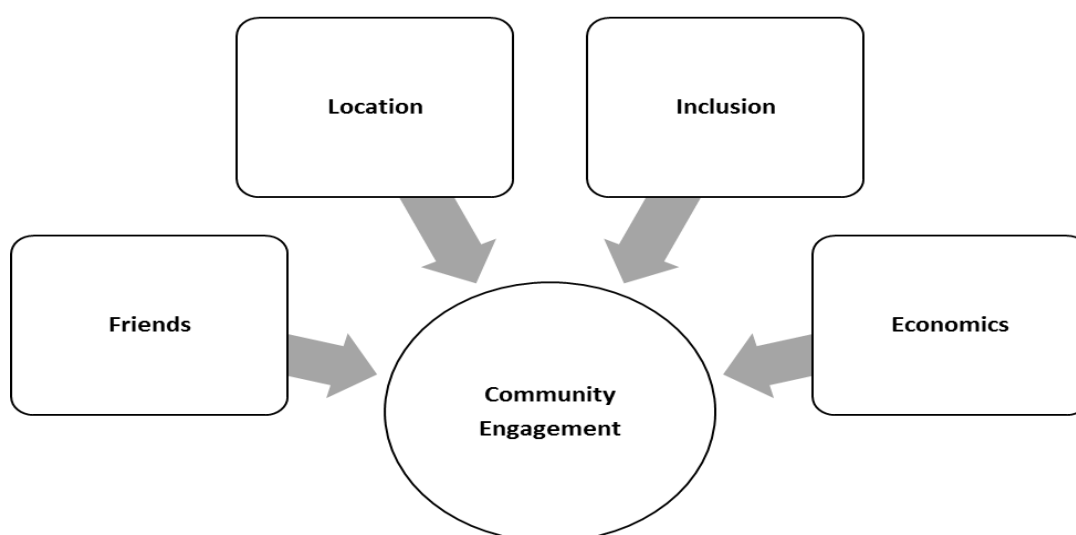
Both sets of purposes highlight inclusion, collaboration and community. The primary distinction is that Little League emphasizes the word “fun” while the Traveling’s ultimate goal is to support the local high school and legion teams. This may be partly due to the age range of kids in each program. Little League is from age five to twelve, while Traveling is from age ten to fifteen. The overlap between the programs is age’s ten to twelve and this is where much of the conflict exists. Another distinction between the

leagues is location. In order to build a schedule to play other communities Traveling works through a league called State Baseball League. This is similar to Little League. State does not have a mission statement, but does have information online regarding the organization's focus, which is to facilitate effective tournaments. Little League primarily plays their games within the community, while Traveling primarily plays their games outside the community.

Community Engagement Discourse

In addition to the idea of "competing at the highest level of competition," the youth baseball discourse in Sterling City includes meaning about community engagement. What does it mean to run a program that supports the community? Which program is more community oriented? Per Figure 2, the participants identified four components of community engagement: friends, location, inclusion and economics.

Figure 2 – Community Engagement



When it comes to playing with friends, Coach Adam has nostalgic memories of when he played baseball:

“To this day you can talk to Derrick Smith my next door neighbor. I got to pitch against him. We talk about it to this day and if you play Traveling you don’t get to pitch against your next door neighbor. It’s like the last bastion of playing against the neighborhood kids, which was very important to me. 40 years later and I’m talking about it with you. I’m not saying that the kids that play Traveling aren’t going to have good memories, they’re not just going to have that many” (personal communication, May 30, 2015).

This is part of why Coach Adam chose Little League for his son, even though his son was the most skilled player at ages ten, eleven and twelve. Similarly, Coach Patrick enjoyed watching the kids play against one another: “I loved watching the kids come up to bat against their best friend on the mound. There's nothing like it. When you're playing Traveling, that's rarely going to happen. It was fun to see a kid go up to plate, or pitch, and have a smile on their face, because they spent the day with that other kid” (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

Location is also part of how each program defines community. Little League is more of an intra-community program. At most levels, regular season games are played at Sterling City fields. The kids generally know one another from school, church or synagogue. Traveling is more of an inter-community program. Their regular season games are played against teams from other communities, whereby the kids generally do not know one another. Coach Kent suggested Traveling lacks a “sense of community.

They don't care if they are going all over the place. The whole idea of going to [Robin Field], seeing friends and community, families getting together - they don't care about that" (personal communication, April 29, 2016). Coach Scott, had a different take on location:

"Little League has been great for my kids. I do think Traveling is the better model, at least twelve [years old] and up, because while I enjoyed coaching and playing against my peers and my friends' peers, I don't know if that's always the healthy way to do it. I think you're better off going to play at [another city]. I think the word Traveling gets a bad name, because they think you're going all over town and all over creation. You're really not" (personal communication, July 26, 2016).

Coach Scott thinks that the word "Traveling" itself hurts the program. He said that it is "community baseball. That's what State Baseball advertises itself as. It's a community based program. People think is some kind of rogue program and that we're going off on our own and doing that, but it's truly not" (personal communication, July 26, 2016).

Inclusion is another component of how people define and talk about community engagement. All kids that live within the Sterling City Little League boundary are eligible to register and play, regardless of skill. In Traveling, kids are required to try out each year. In fact, a player can make it to Traveling at age ten and not make it at age eleven. Unlike Traveling, Coach Mark believes that Little League is a community program and that "everybody that wants to play baseball plays baseball, they all play together" (personal communication, May 7, 2016).

The economic consideration begins with the size of each organization. The annual Little League roster averages about 400 kids between the ages of five and twelve. The Traveling roster average is approximately 60 kids between the ages of ten and fifteen. Little League generally collects more fees and sponsorships. In addition, Little League has invested in fields and equipment for over sixty years. Although the City of Sterling owns the fields, Little League has the capital to invest in improvements such as sprinklers and lights. With the size and scale, Little League has an advantage in being better funded than Traveling.

The Little League registration fee is generally in the \$100 range, while traveling can be up to \$400. Both organizations offer scholarships for kids that cannot afford to play. Coach Ryan suggests that the Traveling parents are buying an experience:

“The Traveling parent, or I should say the top 50% of the Traveling parents in Sterling City, wants their kid to have an experience, so they're buying an experience. They're buying the ‘my kid got to play in the state tournament,’ experience. Well, every team in Traveling baseball pretty much gets to play in the state tournament. They get to have three or four weekends of tournaments in different towns. Again, it's more about having the experience. They want the experience for their kid” (personal communication, June 11, 2015).

Traveling has a version of the Little League World Series called Cooperstown. This is the home of the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame. Coach Ryan believes that it is not an achievement to get to Cooperstown, but that it comes down to whether or not you want to buy the experience. He believes that getting to the Little League World Series is

an achievement, but “a lot of towns do this deal where they go to Cooperstown, New York and they play in the Cooperstown tournament and that's basically buying your kid a Little League World Series experience” (personal communication, June 11, 2015). Coach Irwin mentioned that one of his friends used to complain “about how much it was just to play in-house [recreational]. He was like, ‘My kid, how is he ever going to play travel because it’s 350 bucks. We have to go all over the stinking state plus there’s the cost of keeping up with the Jones (personal communication, May 15, 2016). Coach Pete called Traveling “checkbook baseball” because kids deserve their playing time (personal communication, June 26, 2015).

Traveling teams can play two to three times the number of games than their Little League counterparts, including weekend tournaments. Being up to four times more expensive presents a barrier to entry for families whose kids may be interested. This is especially difficult for a small organization to attract customers. Traveling does host a successful tournament each year to raise money to accommodate families in need. Coach Kirk reminisced about why he appreciated Little League:

“I don’t know anything about the financial structure of the Traveling league versus Little League, but what I remember from Little League was that it was relatively inexpensive. Sterling City Little League in particular had scholarships for kids because the mentality was ‘we will never turn a kid away who wants to play baseball.’ That was something I was always very, very proud of” (personal communication, May 14, 2016).

So while Little League was trying to compete with Traveling, the program takes every kid regardless of skill. That is part of the mission of the organization and their definition of community. However, it makes it a challenge to “compete at the highest level of competition” when Traveling is only selecting the most talented kids. That puts Little League’s community-oriented mission in conflict with the expectation for competition. The ongoing discourse about the symbol of community has deepened each programs conviction about why their program is the best choice for parents.

Myths and Childhood Experiences

Coach Dusty brought the narrative, “competing at the highest level of competition” to the Sterling City baseball community as the reason for building a Traveling program. This was difficult for Little League, which in effect was consigned to a “recreational league.” This was not aligned to its annual capstone event, the Little League World Series. This mythic event is held in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, the site where Little League originated. Wouldn’t the Little League World Series qualify as “competing at the highest level of competition?” How could Little League reconcile the new narrative of being a recreational league when its goal is to send a team to Williamsport? When I was President of Little League, we wanted to win the state tournament and advance to the regional tournament in Indianapolis. The team that wins the regional tournament advances to the Little League World Series. In order to meet our goal, we rejected the narrative that we were a recreational league and we began competing with Traveling for the most skilled players at each age level.

At this point, Sterling City had two organizations that were designing programs

to “compete at the highest level of competition.” Coach Kent remembers a legendary game in 2013. Little League entered its twelve year old all-star team in a Traveling tournament. Traveling also had a twelve year old team in the same tournament. The two teams advanced to play one another in the final. Coach Kent said that “Little League lost by a run. It was a super close game [and] . . . came to the very end. The Little League [team] lost” (personal communication, April 29, 2016). This was not only a game between two Sterling City teams, but also a game about two programs competing for product excellence. Traveling won by one run, but it was close and Little League felt that it made a statement.

The annual cycle of the mythic Little League World Series tournament in Durkheim’s terms, is a collective ritual that defines the schedule and is symbolic of youth sports excellence (Durkheim, 1912 [1966]). It is extremely difficult to get to the World Series. There are legendary stories in Sterling City about one of the coaches who almost made it to the regional tournament when he was a kid. In addition, two other cities in the state made it to Williamsport since 2001. These cities have two to three times the number of kids and one city does not have a Traveling program. In 1976 and 1979, Sterling City won the state tournament. At the time, the state played a tournament with a neighboring state. The winner advanced to the regional tournament. Sterling City lost both times. Getting to the World Series is a dream. Coach Adam partly chose Little League for his son due to the nostalgia of the World Series:

“I chose Little League for my son for a couple of reasons. Number one the fact that Little League was on ESPN. Every year I would tell my son, ‘We’re going to

be on ESPN. We're going to Williamsport. When you're 12 we're going to Williamsport'" (personal communication, May 30, 2015).

The World Series is a significant part of how Little League brands "competing against the highest level of competition." Little League references the World Series on its web site:

"On the world stage, recognition comes to its pinnacle every August, as more than 130 Little League Baseball and Softball games are televised worldwide on ABC and the ESPN family of networks. However, reaching a World Series is only the end of a long and exciting journey that showers timeless accolades on your league, community, region, state, territory, province and country. For the millions of children who play in the regular season and for those who choose to play 'all-stars' but don't reach a World Series, the moments and memories of Little League are equally influential because of the people they meet along the way."

However, the chance of Sterling City making to the World Series is mythic, one that comes with governance and the rituals that support the "pinnacle" event of the season. Herein lies the problem for both leagues to operate in Sterling City. How can both organizations be "competing at the highest level of competition?" This choice to participate in the myth of the Little League World Series has contributed to the conflict between both programs. If Little League had accepted the role of a participative, recreational league, then Traveling could exist as the competitive league.

Youth Baseball Taxonomy, Pre and Post Schism

A taxonomy, termed by Lincoln, developed in Sterling City youth baseball around the symbols of development, rules and control, winning and commitment. This was the result of two programs recruiting for the best talent to “compete at the highest level of competition,” mostly at the ten to twelve year old levels, and to fulfill their own sense of mission. Following the schism, figures 3 and 4 depict how Little League was redefined as a recreational league.

Figure 3 – Prior to 2001

20th Century Youth Baseball Taxonomy

Little League

Myth/Ritual:

Baseball as National
Pastime

Civic Monopoly

Community symbols:

All kids eligible

Skills not required

Inclusive

Neighborhood teams

Financial sponsors

Prior to 2001, Little League was the only option for youth baseball. It was more or less a civic monopoly throughout the 20th century operating more like a government services organization than a “Parks and Rec” program. The thought of another option would be

considered both non-competitive and less inclusive. Given its civic responsibility, Little League was viewed as an organization whereby all kids can play, and skills and resources were not required. Even in the mid-1970s, the teams were built more on the concept of neighborhoods than cities. Baseball was the national pastime and Little League was a children’s version of that narrative. Given this alignment to the “national pastime” and the capstone Little League World Series event, this seemed the best way to package a community baseball program. When Dusty introduced the idea that Traveling was the way to “compete at the highest level of competition,” he redefined Little League as a community based, recreational program. Reminiscent of opening borders through free trade agreements, the Traveling strategy was to identify the players with the best skills at each age level and compete with other communities. Coach Tom agreed, suggesting

Figure 4 – Post Birth of Traveling League

(from Coaches Perspective)

	(+)	(-)
	Highest Level of Competition (Traveling)	Recreation (Little League)
Symbols:		
Development	“Support our High School and Legion teams”	“Stress basic baseball fundamentals”
Rules / Control	Increasingly more challenging & more control	Less difficult & less control
Winning	Develop skills to win tournaments	“Being a competitive team rather than to win at all costs.”
Commitment	More baseball	Less baseball

that Little League “wants all the kids in the community to play together, and people that go to Traveling don't want to be watered down by kids who haven't played as long, are not as good, [and] are not as dedicated” (personal communication, April 23, 2016).

Traveling competition occurs through a regular season schedule, along with weekend tournaments. Teams that place at a certain level at weekend tournaments qualify for the state tournament. If the best players were in Traveling, what did that mean for Little League? It may have not been intentional and it certainly was not explicit, but the idea essentially made Little League a recreational program. While this seems like a rational explanation for what happened, coaches do not see it this way. In addition to “competing at the highest level of competition”, Coach Irwin suggested:

“You have parents who think their kids are really good and need to have more baseball at a higher level or they want to live vicariously through their kid. They want their kid to be perceived as someone who is a superstar athlete. I think they all have their own personal agenda as far as why they think they need to play travel baseball” (personal communication, May 15, 2016).

Coach Ted has been in both Traveling and Little League. He sees Traveling “as a better game, a better challenge” (personal communication, April 23, 2016). He went on to suggest that parents “have a wide variety of different agendas. Most of them all have to do with ‘I want my kid to be looked at as a better athlete. I want to live vicariously through my kid. I don't want to be playing this city run league.’” (personal communication, April 23, 2016). Built on the distinction of competitive vs. recreational, the two programs have developed as symbols of development, rules and control,

winning and commitment. And as is typical for the kinds of strongly held assumptions that comprise taxonomies, supporters of both sides of what is now a schism are deeply divided about its meaning and implications.

Developing Child for the Future

Per its website, Sterling City Traveling Baseball Association's "ultimate vision is to foster consistent teams at the youth level to support our High School and Legion teams." This has been perceived by the Little League parents as trying to develop kids into Major League Baseball players. Coach Patrick has been involved in Sterling City baseball for over twenty years. He has been a coach and has served every board role for almost every league. He reflected about his younger son's cohort:

"[They are] trying to make it through their earlier 20's, the kids who started it. Not one of them is playing pro baseball. One or two of them are playing college baseball, but they are all doing what everybody does. Hopefully, found either school, or vocation, to try and find a future to support themselves, and try to make good" (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

Coach Patrick and I look at the high school squad each year to see where the kids played between the ages of ten to twelve. The results are mixed. It does not seem to matter. It depends more on genetics and passion for the sport than program choice. This is something that parents do not really understand until they have a kid or two move throughout the system. Coach Irwin suggested that a kid "can be hit by lightning 3 times they would ever make [professional] baseball. It's just not something that's going to happen, especially if you live in a state where you can only play the sport for a short

period of time. If you want to play baseball all the time, move to a warm climate” (personal communication, May 15, 2016). Coach Tom thinks that “people go to Traveling because they think that they somehow are going to get better faster, or get better coaching, or their kid's going to be a Major Leaguer. I don't know. Who's the last pro to come out of Sterling City?” (personal communication, April 23, 2016). Based on numerous conversations, I have found one player in the last forty years that made it to Minor League Baseball.

It can be difficult for a parent whose child is highly skilled. Coach Kent's son was one of the top ten year olds in Sterling City. Their family chose Little League because they thought that was the best choice for their son. I asked Coach Kent about this decision:

“Yeah. We had the pull of what was best for him. We could have done it. There was a conversation where people say, ‘Hey, why don't you have Mickey do Traveling?’ It just was not what we were looking for at that time. As it turns out, he has not been negatively affected” (personal communication, April 29, 2016).

Coach Kent's son played Traveling between the age of thirteen and fifteen and had a great experience.

Increasingly More Difficult Rules & Control

Rules and baseball operations have been noted as a reason for the schism and are symbolic for why parents choose a program. Coach Patrick suggested that Traveling “wanted to throw out the Little League rules, and start with different rules. That's my

observation, I don't know if that's accurate or not. Then, it just sort of grew from there, and the animosity grew” (personal communication, May 9, 2016). Coach Kirk agreed:

“I have every reason to believe that the whole reason Traveling started was this rogue offshoot from Little League whereas Little League has been around in Sterling City since 1950 something. It was one coach or the group of coaches in Little League one year who were dissatisfied enough with the local Little League chapter that they either went off and founded their own league or glommed onto an existing other league and ran with it” (personal communication, May 14, 2016).

Coach Ted references the idea of getting in trouble with headquarters:

“The way Traveling started was a . . . how do I want to put this? They put two people in a room and they could not agree on how they wanted their child to play baseball and it just totally blew up after that. There's too many people that run around here and want control, instead of maybe playing by the rules. This is Little League, this is what we want to do. This is what they say we can do. If something else happens with that, we could get into trouble from Pennsylvania. They didn't want that. They just took their kids and left” (personal communication, April 23, 2016).

At the core, baseball is played on a field. The Little League field is smaller than the Traveling field. Coach Ted has coached three kids in Little League and Traveling. He is an expert on the processes and rules of both organization. He chose Traveling for each kid due to competitive rules such as field size:

“In Little League, you're at 45 foot mound and 60 foot bases all the way through. This year at age 11, Traveling has a 47 foot mound and 65 foot bases. Next year, at 12, we go to a 54 foot mound and we go to 70 foot bases, or 75 foot bases. It should progress” (personal communication, April 23, 2016).

By extending field dimensions, the Traveling organization is preparing their players for the high school field dimensions. That aligns with their mission.

In 2007, Little League headquarters decided that all twelve year olds must play at the Majors level, which is the “highest level of competition” in Little League. This angered local leagues. Coach Adam remembers this change and the inconsistency with safety rules:

“They had safety officers that went around to all the leagues and helped them with their manual and then they do something that feels unsafe. They tell us, they mandate to us that all 12 year olds are going to be at the Majors level. If they choose so to be at the Majors level, then you could say, ‘I really think Johnny should be in the Minors because I think it’s unsafe if he plays in the majors. Why is it unsafe? Because Johnny isn’t coordinated enough and Johnny doesn’t move when the ball’s hit. Johnny’s just not a kid who’s ready to play at that level.’ Now that’s a safety issue in my book, if Johnny is not ready to play at that level. They’re so big in safety and yet they make a mandate like that. That was bothersome to me” (personal communication, April 30, 2015).

The twelve year old teams participate in the Little League World Series tournament.

This change effectively watered down Little League. Now the Little League coaches

knew how the Traveling coaches felt about building a team to “compete at the highest level of competition.” This is an example where institutional mandates partly contribute to rebellion and schism. Little League is a bureaucratic organization. It provides an operating manual for all charters to follow. It creates rules such as the twelve year old rule. The Traveling folks did not like the rules and the lack of flexibility. Coach Paul has been a coach for two sons and served numerous roles on the Sterling City Little League board. He viewed the conflict as the need for control:

“The conflict is basically parents wanting control. Little League doesn't always offer a lot of that with the rules they have, with the selection of all stars, with the redrafting of majors. The guy who has got the top kid can't control every player that plays with them, and every practice that they do and where they go for tournaments. I assume that's part of it. He [the Traveling coach] literally picks his team. He calls up the parents and says, ‘Do you want to be on my team?’” (personal communication, July 30, 2016).

Traveling baseball offers more control in light of the rules and bureaucracy. It offers a chance for coaches and parents to have more of control of process. I spoke to coach Patrick about this topic:

“I think really, as I understand it, and as I sort of observe from afar, it was really just a lack of control. My belief is that Little League was sort of run with its altruistic mission to give all the kids a chance to play a minimum amount, and distribute the talent amongst the teams, so that there is hopefully an even level of play” (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

In 2002, Sterling City Little League sent a letter to the City Manager regarding the merger of National and South Little Leagues. The letter included a paragraph about the inability for Little League to work out a compromise with the newly formed Traveling organization. Three reasons were identified in the letter: Traveling required a full-time Traveling component vs. part time, would not agree to an open draft and tryout process with all players being part of a common draft pool, and was not willing to have the coaches go through a coach selection process. All three were Little League requirements. Traveling wanted to control the process and they were not able to so within the broader Little League operating model. Coach Patrick provided additional insight on the need for control:

“I think at that point, there were some parents, and really, I am going to say parents because the kids probably don't care. Maybe a few of them do, but in a bell shaped curve, it's a small number who care. There are some parents who want a little bit more control, and a little more for their kid. ‘I want my kid to only play with kids who are of like talent, and desire’” (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

It is difficult to control who your kids play with in Little League. I remember coaches who petitioned for a “neighborhood” team to help assist families with carpooling. Often, these teams were hand selected based on talent and would end up in the championship game. New tryout, draft and team selection processes were implemented to mitigate this risk. Coaches with experience in both programs seem to

support that the Little League rules support an inclusive, recreational league vs. “competing at the highest level of competition.”

Winning as an Objective

The Little League mission stresses working “towards being a competitive team rather than to win at all costs.” An excellent example of their philosophy about winning is the Greg Johnson tournament. Coach Greg came up with the idea of having a post season tournament for last place teams. The response was overwhelming. Twenty five years later, cities throughout the district send their last place teams to the Greg Johnson Tournament. Coaches in Little League have to learn how to carefully manage this balance. Coach Mark shared a story:

“During the season one of the mothers came up to me and said, ‘Watching your practice it's hard to tell who's having more fun, you or the kids.’ I said, ‘Yeah, we try to learn something but have a good time too.’ You've got to keep it fun and you've got to keep it interesting. In there, winning helps. Little League was kind of saying, ‘Winning isn't important,’ but I can tell you what, I was a lot better coach when I was 21-0 than when I was five hundred. It's just funny that way”

(personal communication, May 7, 2016).

Coach Kent has experienced both programs. He felt that Traveling had a “difference in values. I mean look at whatever those 3 words are on the patch of Little League” (personal communication, April 29, 2016). The Little League patch does have three words. The words are “character, courage and loyalty”. The State Baseball organization

and Sterling City Traveling Baseball do not have patches. Their respective logos emphasize tournaments. Coach Tom also had kids in both programs:

“I think for younger kids who aren't as experienced or play other sports or whatever, in-house [Little League] is better. It was a lot more pressure for Traveling because they're supposedly elite or better or they're more interested in playing more often. So there's a lot. We played baseball six times a week when they're 11 years old, which is a little much, but that's what I thought was expected. That was the big thing, development for in-house yes, winning for Traveling” (personal communication, April 23, 2016).

He felt that the objectives of the programs are “inherent in the name for the way we think about it, but Traveling just means you're going off to do more competitive stuff and in-house is we're just playing with your schoolmates or friends basically” (personal communication, April 23, 2016). Coach Ted has also participated in both programs.

He's frustrated with what he see as a bigger problem:

“To be completely honest, there's too much in society today that everybody wins. In Little League, everybody gets a trophy, everybody gets a ribbon, and everybody gets the participation award. In Traveling you don't become a winner until Sunday afternoon [tournament finals]. That's when the trophies are handed out. That's when you get judged on your performance” (personal communication, April 23, 2016).

Going back to Sterling City Little League's statement about “winning at all costs,” there are examples on both sides whereby teams will do whatever it takes. There are famous

Little League World Series stories about teams and coaches that cheat with player ages or residency status. In Traveling, coaches select one of three leagues for which their team will play: A, AA or AAA. Level A is the lowest level and AAA is the highest level. Sometimes a coach will play at a lower level in order to win. That goes against the narrative of “competing at the highest level of competition.” Coach Mark shared this perspective:

“Traveling's goal is to win. It's also to develop players, but it's to win. That team played in whatever A they played in. They had no business being in that league when they went 50-3 or whatever. We could do the same thing too if we played whatever that was” (personal communication, May 7, 2016).

Once a Traveling team wins a state tournament, that team is forced to play at the next level the following year. That is a built in control to prevent what Coach Mark described. However, winning within a recreational league is different than winning in a league that wants to win a state championship. The rub for Little League is the World Series tournament. I once met with a group of influential Traveling coaches to see if we could find common ground. All three coaches played college and semiprofessional baseball. One of them, Coach Sam, said, “You guys are never going to the Little League World Series. You do not have the numbers or the talent” (personal communication, 20011). This punctuates the belief that Little League is perceived as a symbol of a recreational league and Traveling is “competing at the highest level of competition.” Winning as an objective is another way that parents interpret Traveling as a product option.

Committed to (More) Baseball

The Traveling coaches that I have met emphasize commitment. What is commitment? It means that the child and family will make baseball a priority. I had a conversation about commitment with Coach Louis, a former President of Sterling City Traveling Baseball, and an excellent coach. Louis stressed that the kids and families would need to make baseball a priority. That means they would attend all practices and games, up to fifty games a season. Coach Mark shared a Little League experience that is a good example of non-commitment:

“I don't remember the kid's name, but I still remember, he didn't want to play and his mother kept bringing him. It was a tournament game on a Majors field and he's at second base crying. The ball hadn't even been thrown yet. He was just crying and crying. I said, 'What's the matter?' 'I hate this, why do I do this,' he said. I told him, 'You'll be fine, don't worry about it. The sun is going to come up tomorrow no matter what happens.' He went out for the second inning and I think he ran off the field during the inning and never played again. The mother came up and thanked me for at least trying” (personal communication, May 7, 2016).

When parents make their kids play baseball, it can be difficult for a coach. How can you “compete at the highest level of competition” if you have a child like the one on Coach Mark's team? The Traveling process does not allow for this type of kid to be on the team. They want kids who are committed to baseball and will play at least twice as

many games as their Little League counterparts. Mark also talked about the challenge of parents that do not have commitment:

“You want him [the player] to keep coming back and you want him to look forward to practice. I always wanted players there an hour before the game and if it's a 6:00 game that was a hard thing to do for a lot of families. I remember one mother saying, ‘Well, I've got clients and all that,’ and I said, ‘Well then, send an e-mail. Someone will give your son a ride.’” (Personal communication, May 7, 2016).

Commitment is more than the desire to play more baseball. It includes the parent making sure the child gets to practice on time. It includes a commitment for a registration fee that is up to three to four times the cost of Little League. In order to “compete at the highest level of competition,” there is little time for a Traveling coach to worry about someone getting to practice or working with a kid that does not want to play baseball. The idea is that kids like the one on Coach Mark's team belong in a recreational league. The rub is that Coach Mark has a competitive streak in him and wants to win. He's chosen the Little League to support the community and gets to work with kids at all levels of talent:

“I think most of the better players went to Traveling because that's what the better players do. There was always kids that had other things in life in the summer besides baseball, and so they couldn't go for weekend tournaments and things of that nature or maybe they were really good at another sport, but just

wanted to play baseball for the fun of it" (personal communication, May 7, 2016).

The schedule is another key reflection of commitment. The Little League World Series drives the schedule. The World Series games are scheduled in August. Starting with this date, the schedulers have to account for the regional and state tournaments. That means that regular season play has to conclude early to mid-June. Coach Mark describes this as the "beef that the Traveling folks have always had. They've always said, 'You're never going to the World Series anyways, but you condense your season. . . . If you didn't have that constraint you could take more games'" (personal communication, May 7, 2016). He went on to say:

"Okay, well, I don't know. This is a problem that quite persists to this day is that we had to organize our schedule based upon when the Little League World Series was. We had to be done by June something in order for the team to go off. Some years, because of weather, we couldn't do that. We lost games because we couldn't play after that" (personal communication, May 7, 2016).

Coach Ted specifically chose Traveling for his youngest son because he "wanted to play more baseball. Jimmy wanted to play more baseball. He's good at it and it's not like we forced him to play more baseball. Jimmy played 55 games last year" (personal communication, April 23, 2016). He is highly critical of the Little League schedule stating that "it's like the first week of June now. They start the last week of April or May, then end in June. If you don't make an all-star team, you're pretty much out of baseball" (personal communication, April 23, 2016). We used to have a term for what we called

“cabin families.” These families registered for Little League due to flexibility of the schedule so they could go to their cabin every weekend. Coach Pete suggested that “if you're in Little League, and you're going on a family vacation the second week of July, you go on your family vacation” (personal communication, June 26, 2016). That would not work for Traveling. For some parents, Traveling symbolizes a level of commitment that does or does not align to the needs of their family.

Attempts to Bridge the Schism

Kids in Sterling City are increasingly quitting baseball to play Lacrosse. Because lacrosse and baseball have the same season, the sport is a threat for both Little League and Traveling. Like North and South merging years earlier to combat Traveling, attempts have been made to partner in the baseball community to combat lacrosse and other choices in youth sports. In addition to competing with other sports, there are economic and talent reasons for the programs to work together. Pooling resources and leveraging the competency of the Traveling coaches could make both programs stronger.

In 2006, there was an effort to merge the thirteen to eighteen year old baseball programs. It was a good conversation, but did not result in material changes. A few years later, I led an effort to bring the organizations together, recommending that we add a tournament component to Little League for ten to twelve year olds. This would allow for a hybrid model that accommodated participation in the Little League World Series tournament and “competing at the highest level of competition.” The effort did not succeed. In 2009, Coach Patrick facilitated the creation of one baseball association

that would oversee each league at all age levels. Again, the conversation was about combining the ten to twelve year olds. The final agreement was to only have one Traveling team at age ten, eleven and twelve respectively. This stunted the growth of Traveling and allowed Little League to retain talent. In 2013, Coach George created Little League tournament teams as a way to keep ten to twelve year olds from going to Traveling. He had moderate success. Currently, both programs are working at a compromise whereby the ten and eleven year olds would be combined and the best twelve year olds would be Traveling. The recurring challenge for this solution is the myth of the Little League World Series for twelve year olds. The baseball community wants to be one organization and continues to work towards that effort.

This chapter described the history and participant perspectives of a schism event in the Sterling City baseball community. Two organizations now compete for talent in a limited market and leverage recruiting tactics that emphasize the meaning of community engagement and the ability to develop players. Development is grounded in the idea of “competing at the highest level of competition.” Parents make a program choice based on the symbolic interpretation of development, rules and control, commitment and winning. The nature of youth baseball in Sterling City has evolved from a civic, participative activity to an “experience” that parents can choose for their kids.

CHAPTER FIVE: The Dramaturgy of the Parent Coach

Following the schism, there was a heightened focus in Sterling City for Little League to emphasize its competitive advantage. This added pressure to existing challenges faced by coaches. Using Goffman's metaphor of the theater to explain social life, the youth baseball "drama" includes scenes such as practices, interacting with parents and making game time decisions. Goffman described the baseball coach as the field-based director of the performance (Goffman, 1959), whereby coaches interact with kids, parents, umpires and other coaches to develop and deliver on their primary script – compete and have fun. The coaches that I spoke to for this study highlighted two specific aspects of the "drama" that were consistently challenging, managing perceived favoritism and balancing the objectives of competing and having fun. In this chapter, I will explore these as scenes and use Goffman's concepts of dramaturgical analysis and impression management to better understand the increasingly challenging role of the parent coach in Sterling City.

Scene 1: Managing Perceived Favoritism

The role of parent coach has many highs and lows, often relating to coaching one's own child. Participant stories ranged from the joy of community engagement and bonding with a child to the heartfelt regrets of managing expectations and aligned motivations. Does a child love baseball? Or, does the child play to win the praise of the parent? Is the need for achievement with the kid or the parent? What happens when a kid does not love the game and the parent coach pushes for achievement? Parent coaches ask themselves these and many other difficult questions, sometimes long after

the experience. On the simple joys of coaching, Coach Pete said, “My favorite moment is always driving to games and from games. Sometimes we would talk about what happened, whether it was a sparkling play that he was involved with or a lousy call. Sometimes we'd talk, and sometimes not. We just would drive together” (personal communication, June 26, 2015). Parent coaches are also part of a community. Coach Ryan suggested that the “best part about coaching your kids is you get to know the kids that are their peers. Having a kid that just graduated, you go through graduation and you know so many kids. You work the senior party and you know kids by name. They know your name. Even, I think, having a daughter, it's interesting because I go to a girls' soccer game and know the boys that show up to watch the girls. You know the referees. I know all the kids, boys and girls” (personal communication, June 11, 2015).

When it comes to regrets, I can vividly remember a moment with each son. Both situations involved me publicly berating them for performance or behavior. For me, it was much easier to yell at my kids than to yell at the team. Coach Jim described a regrettable moment in his “moral career” as a coach:

“I was just getting too competitive. It was an important game. It was in the playoffs and I kept saying, ‘Just block the ball. Just do not let it get by you,’ and it got by him and a couple runs scored. I threw down my clipboard, I think I might have been coaching with Ted at the time. The look Mick gave me still just makes me feel like I was a terrible parent” (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016).

Both Jim and I have asked for forgiveness. The boys did not explicitly remember the incidents, but chalked it up as us just being dads. We still feel bad.

Priorities may be different for the child and the parent. Coach Patrick described his son's priority: "If I was coaching, I would replay different things, and I'd kind of try to use those as learning opportunities. Again, in retrospect thinking, he probably just wants to go home, take a shower, and go to a friend's house to sleep over - that's what he wants to do" (personal communication, May 9, 2016). Patrick was more competitive than his son Victor. He told a story about a game:

"The score was tied, and the bases are loaded. They hit a ground ball and John's team made an error. The other team scored the winning run. He taught me a big lesson. Do you want to know what that lesson was? On the way to the car he was whistling, and I was mad. He just looked up at me and he goes 'Dad, it is just a game'" (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

Coach Tom shared a story where he pushed for his son to be in a Traveling program. He believes that he should have "checked [his] ego and stayed in Little League. Maybe Zach would have played longer" (personal communication, Apr. 23, 2016). His son said that he was playing for him. Tom was surprised:

"Whoa, 'don't play for me. I want you to play though. I really want you to play because of the things you're learning. If you're 19 in college and playing on a D league softball [team], you can play and not make a fool out of yourself, or you'll actually go do it because somebody asked you to rather than saying no because you never played baseball.' The big thing was, I liked coaching baseball so I wanted him to stay in baseball. I liked coaching the boys, too. At least Zach claims he liked me coaching him" (personal communication, Apr. 23, 2016).

One of the greatest challenges to parent coaching is the perception that a coach is favoring their own child. Coach Jim summed up his conviction of not favoring his kids as “never wanting to look like I was favoring my kids. I would never bat my kids first” (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016). Even if it was the best decision for the team, Jim would not do it. He went on to say it was about “the perception of it, not just favoring, it's the perception of it. I was always concerned with the perception” (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016). Coach Mark said, “Occasionally there'd be another coach or a parent that might think that I'm giving my son special privileges. I didn't like that. I didn't like that at all” (personal communication, May 7, 2016). The fear of favoring one's own kid was discussed in each interview.

Dilemmas of Coaching One's Child

What drives this fear? Three dilemmas emerged from the participants. The first was rare, egregious examples of coaches that did favor their own kid. Coach Irwin provided an example: “[Dan] would put his son in the most favorable position he possibly could and . . . everyone else was shaking their head. His son should not necessarily be playing that position or batting in that position, but [Dan] would put his kid in those positions.” Another coach also shared an experience about Coach Dan. He said that his son “was a fairly decent player. Was he the best on our team? That's debatable, but it was 100% Jack first, the rest of the team second” (Coach Adam, personal communication, May 30, 2015). In this case, the child was an above average player, but given extreme preferential treatment. An example like this is so incongruent

that it makes coaches wince and approach their role in a way that they are not perceived like Coach Dan.

Other examples of preferential treatment of a very different sort can occur when selecting kids for opportunities. Coach Jim shared his perspective on the “all-star team” selection process:

“I almost never nominated my kids for the all-star team. You'd have other coaches that their kids would be nominated no matter what, and it's like, no way this coach's kid is the best. You'd pick 4 from your team, or 3 from your team, and I knew their team really well and I coached most of the kids on their team and there's no way the coach's kid is one of the top 4 on that team. I would error on the side of having all of the coaches do it together and I'd have players involved in it too, especially when they were older in the Majors. I would do that, and my kid wouldn't get nominated, nor did I nominate him. Clayton, one year I think, had a really good year and was a really a strong catcher and stuff, but none of my kids ever played on any all-star teams” (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016).

Another dilemma for coaches is when the coach's kid is one of the best players on the team. There is a perceived correlation between those that volunteer to be parent coaches and the talent of their kids, that coach kids are generally better baseball players. As part of the competitive “drama” of the game, coaches may need to play their kid more than others. Coach Kent discussed this challenge:

“If you asked, ‘Are the kids of coaches good athletes?’ I would say they are usually on the better half of the team. That's good, and it's not. I mean, because there are questions where they put you in awkward positions. I think that there are times where you get caught in what's the best thing for the team - it might be putting your kid in a certain position. Then how do you balance that with fairness? I don't think that's easy all the time. I may think my son's the best leadoff hitter. The problem is, how unbiased is that, saying I think he's the best leadoff hitter? Maybe another parent says ‘Well you may think it, he's your kid.’ I do think that, which can be difficult. Overall, I think that if I had advice on running a Little League or anything, I would never underestimate the importance that a coach has with their own children” (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016).

The perceived advantage of being the coach's kid can also be a dilemma. Coach Ryan shared this perspective:

“I'm kind of a firm believer that when you coach your own kids, they already have an advantage. They have the advantage that you got 36 baseballs to go hit batting practice with, you have a key to the batting cage, and you can schedule practice around things they have going on. They have a ton of unperceived advantages that most people don't know that are there. They also have a big advantage of they're always there on time because you're going to be there on time and generally coaches' kids are usually a little better than their peers.

They've just got some built-in advantages” (personal communication, June 11, 2015).

Witnessing specific examples of coaches that favor their child, managing the dynamic of a coach’s kid being the best player on the team and the potential built in advantages for the coach’s kid all contribute to motivating a coach to manage perceived favoritism.

Variations of Coaching Dramaturgy

Parent coaches, who are highly motivated to ensure that they are not perceived as favoring their own child want to manage the impression with other parents that they are fair. As a result of talking to the research participants about managing favoritism, three basic approaches emerged, along with dramaturgical staging - Figure 5.

Figure 5 – Managing Favoritism

Coaching Approaches			
Coaching Script	<u>Example Maker</u> Hold own child to a higher standard and uses own child as an example during games	<u>Opportunity Spoiler</u> Does not allow own child to have opportunities	<u>Record Keeper</u> Keeps fastidious records & metrics to justify decisions made regarding child if called out by another parent
Staged Example	Yells at own child after a fielding or base running error	Does not let child play preferred position or participate in all-star games	Tracking on base percentage or batting average to show why a coach’s kid is batting a certain position in the lineup
Staging Locus	Front Stage	Front / Back Stage	Back Stage

Each approach that a coach can utilize to manage perceived favoritism has a script and a staging locus. The script can be front stage or back stage. Goffman suggests that front stage presentation is the actual performance (Goffman, 1959). This includes props, an audience and actors. In youth baseball, the game is the performance. Back stage presentation would include behaviors and activities for which the audience is unaware (Goffman, 1959). Practices are not typically attended by parents, thus making the activity back stage. Coaches tracking the statistics during a game is back stage.

Example Maker

The example maker script features coaches that hold their child to a higher standard, overtly making an example of their kid front stage to prove to the parent community that there is no favoritism. When Anthony was twelve, I made an example of him during a game. He was playing shortstop and he would not execute a play that we had practiced. My two assistant coaches were furious. I called a timeout, walked out to my son and moved him to center field and moved the center fielder to short stop. He said, "Dad, don't do this." I did it anyway. He would not look at me the rest of the game. In fact, he hit a home run over the left field fence and would not give me a high five when he got to the dugout. What I did does not happen very often in a youth baseball game of ten to twelve year olds. I specifically did this to make an example of my son, engaging in a dramaturgical display as part of my role. I would never take this liberty with another kid due to the potential wrath of their parent. I made it clear to the other parents that Anthony would not get special treatment. While this action

disrupted the harmony between me and my son, the assistant coaches and team did not object. This is what Goffman refers to as dramaturgical loyalty (Goffman, 1959). It is a technique used by the actors within a performance to ensure adherence to the script. Essentially, the team and the assistant coaches supported the idea that I would occasionally make an example of my son.

Other coaches also struggled with holding their child to higher standard. Coach Patrick said, “For me personally, the downside was I held my son to a higher standard than other boys his age, which is totally ridiculous” (personal communication, May 9, 2016). He admitted to yelling at his son more than the other boys. I did the same. If we had to discipline the team, Patrick and I would yell at our own kids.

Then there is the dynamic of a coach’s kid being the best player. Coach Kent said that “my kid athletically was probably one of the better kids so I tended to be [harder] on him” (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016). Even though it may have been generally understood that his son was the best player, Coach Kent did not take it for granted. He made his son earn his spot and even more than the rest of the kids. That is how powerful the need is for coaches to not favor their kids. Coach Patrick added this perspective:

“Let’s pick the Majors level because it’s a more competitive brand of ball. This would go all the way through, but it’s more specific to once you start playing more competitive. Head coaches look at their team by starting with their kid. You look at your kid first and to me there is two ways people coach their kid. They’re either more hard on them than everybody else or they totally favor

them. There is really no in-between. You try, you work really hard to find that middle ground but generally you fall in the harder on your kid or the favorable” (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

Except for Coach Irwin, all of the coaches interviewed stated that they were harder on their kids. Coach Irwin had an interesting perspective about his son:

“It was a different situation for me coaching Blake versus maybe someone else coaching their son. Blake was never the best player. He was probably the most coachable player, but he was never the best player. I never had false expectations about what he was or how good he was or what he was going to be. I guess I personally felt it was more of a fair situation and then I wasn’t over coaching Blake because I wanted to give him favoritism versus someone who thinks their kid is really good and should be the star of the team” (personal communication, May 15, 2016).

The idea that Coach Irwin’s son was not the best player on the team made it easier for him to manage favoritism. In addition, he did not have to make an example of Blake and was not harder on him. One of my “moral career” regrets is expecting more from my kids than they could deliver. I was harder on them in terms of behavior and performance. This resulted in disconnect between expectation and capability. Coach Irwin shared where he gained his perspective:

“It was because I was never the best player and so my dad was very honest. My little brother was actually good and played with me even though he was 5 years younger. He was playing up because he wanted to play whereas I just was trying

to keep up. My dad never showed favoritism to me because he knew I wasn't the best and he didn't want to be that guy. That's something that's with me. I'm not that guy who it's my kid is the best so he'll play wherever he wants, whenever he wants and the rest of the team be damned" (personal interaction, May 15, 2016).

Opportunity Spoiler

The opportunity spoiler role features a script whereby coaches actively manage the opportunities for their kid. As a veteran coach, I believe that the primary opportunities in Little League are the positions in the batting order and the field. Kids want to be the lead-off hitter (first in the order) or the clean-up hitter (fourth in the order). They show up to games anxiously awaiting the coach to post the batting order, secretly hoping that they are not batting last. Field positions are another opportunity. The infield positions were perceived to be the most desirable and the outfield positions the least desirable.

Another opportunity for kids is an all-star team. Each year in Sterling City the best eight to twelve year olds participate in tournaments with other Little League all-star teams. The names of selected players are celebrated through a posting to the Little League website. It is an honor for the kids. Generally, the opportunity spoiler limits these advantages for their child as a way to manage perceived favoritism. Coach Jim's shared his wife's perspective on how his approach affected his kids and said that his moral compass was "too high sometimes. 'You know what Jim, it's unrealistic how high you set that sometimes'" (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016). Jim's son Graham

was the fastest kid on the team “so putting him in lead-off spot made sense, but there was something about it that I thought parents were going to perceive it as favoring my kid” (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016).

Like many coaches, Ryan said, “My kids probably got less experiences with me being a coach than when they had other people as their coach.” He simply did not want other people to perceive him as favoring his children. With pitching as a preferred position, Coach Ryan took this approach:

“Now, people may have thought I was favoring my kids, but I never made the decision if one of my kids was going to pitch. Generally, what would happen is another coach would say, ‘Hey, let's put Isaac in to pitch. Let's put Bridget in to pitch.’ I never tried to put that into my decision making” (personal communication, June 11, 2015).

I also used this approach with Anthony by encouraging him to be an outfielder. By the time he was thirteen, he did not want to play any position other than center field. However, when kids are younger, the outfield is like being banished to a wasteland. It is definitely not a preferred position. When parents consistently saw my son in the outfield, it helped me manage the impression of fairness. As the field-based director, one of the duties of the coach is to allocate the “parts in the performance and the personal front that is employed in each part” (Goffman, 1959). The opportunity spoiler uses his role as director to carefully place his child in just the right position, line-up spot and other opportunities to avoid the perception of favoritism.

Record Keeper

The record keeper role features meticulously kept statistics back stage in case the coach is called out for favoritism. This coach can ground decisions for their child based on facts and data. Tom shared his perspective about how to use facts at to determine the batting order:

“As Zach was growing up, he lacked coordination and looked a little awkward at the plate. You know what? He always had the 5th best on base percentage, so who do you bat fifth? One kid looks like a pro baseball player, batted .182 and couldn't even steal bases when he did get on base. He had the 12th best on base percentage” (personal communication, Apr. 23, 2016).

Tom fastidiously tracked of all the stats because he was managing the impression of his son's performance and his coaching decisions. Zach was a symbol of an ineffective baseball player because of how he looked. The other kid was a symbol of excellence given his physical appearance, even though he could not hit the ball. The facts were different than the symbolic interpretations and Coach Tom was ready for a confrontation about favoritism. Coach Mark also kept detailed statistics:

“As a dad, as a parent coach, it's hard not to favor your kid no matter what you do or to treat them the same. There's a lot of stuff that goes into that, coaches' kids on teams, I think. I always tried to be as objective as I could. I made the batting order based on how kids have performed. I've got all the stats. I don't care that your kid has the best swing on the team. If he can't hit the ball, it

doesn't matter, he's going to bat 9th, or 10th or 11th" (personal interaction, May 7, 2016).

This dynamic also plays into conversations with kids. Coach Jim coached four sons:

"I did it for so long I kind of evolved over years. In the beginning years, I would always keep spreadsheets and everything because I didn't want people to say that you're playing your kid more at this position, or you're showing preference. I'd have talks with my sons about that, 'Maybe because you think I'm the coach you think I could put you first in the batting order, but I'm really just going to do it based on the skill sets of the kids on the team'" (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2016).

References to back stage rehearsals (practices) can also be used as evidence that a coach is not favoring a kid. Coach Mark shared his perspective:

"That's one of the downsides of coaching. I know from experience that most of the parents go there to watch their kid play and that's the primary reason why they're there. I looked more at practices. If the kid was off doing nothing in practice and he wasn't even part of the team in practice, and he wasn't trying to get better, then I could tell parents, 'Games are one thing, but you get better in practice. I have to see the effort in practice'" (personal interaction, May 7, 2016).

Managing perceived favoritism is a difficult task for a parent coach. On the front stage, a coach can be explicit by making their child an example. This manifests itself through public discipline, position selection and batting order. Parent coaches balance

this with managing another impression – that they are a competent coach that can develop a competitive team. That means that they may have to make decisions that look like favoritism if their kid is one of the best players. The opportunity spoiler is front and back stage approach on the more extreme side. This is for coaches that cannot handle any degree of perceived favoritism. It trumps the need to competently develop a competitive team. The record keeper is a back stage approach. This coach worries about development and competing, but like coiled snake can strike with facts and data.

Scene II: The Balance of Competing and Having Fun

In addition to managing favoritism, the parent coaches interviewed for this study discussed the challenge of balancing the tension between competing and having fun. For purposes of this research, I will define “competing” as separate from the outcome of winning or losing. It is the experience of “being in the game,” of “having a chance for success,” and “not getting one’s butt kicked.” Managing this dynamic is part of a coaches “moral career,” an ever present stress contingent on both institutional objectives and a coach’s personal values. Every aspect of the performance is framed around these two goals. How a coach manages favoritism, for example, could impact the competitiveness of the team. A coach may have to tradeoff parent issues that arise from playing their own kid too much to offset parent issues from not being competitive. When a team is not competitive, it can be difficult to have fun. Sometimes it is no win situation for a parent coach.

The Taxonomy of Fun Verses Competition in Little League

In his book, *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture*, Gary Fine describes Little League as sport and play. Part of the role of the participants is to work. This means staying focused on the task at hand, which is to play baseball. The other part is to have fun. Fine calls this the “Rhetoric of Fun” (Fine, 1987). He identifies three behavioral components of fun. Game excitement includes the thrills when good things happen during a game, such as a home run or the tying run on 3rd base. The second component is not taking the game seriously, which is basically when the kids goof off. The third component is side involvements (Fine, 1987). I remember a time when the kids in the dugout started making a drawing with sunflower seed shells that they found in the dugout. It was gross, but they were having a blast. During his research, Fine asked a coach about the goal of Little League:

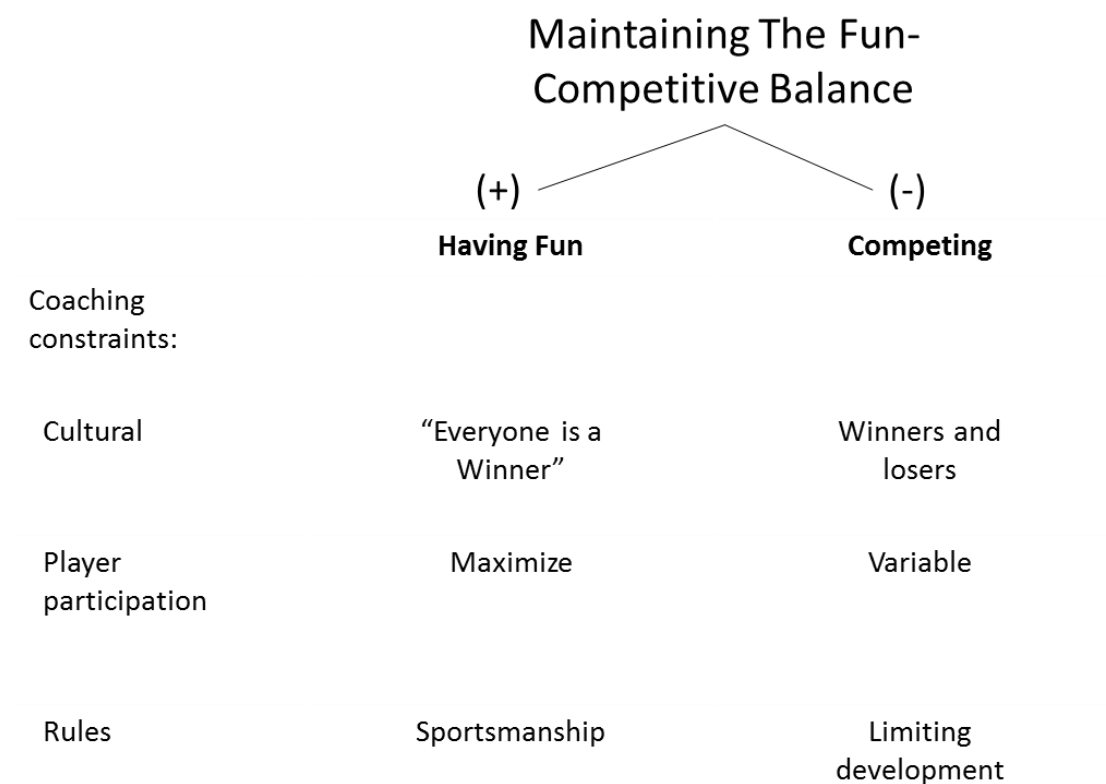
“I think it should be more for the boys. I don’t think it should be over organized . . . I think it has a tendency sometimes to not be as fun for the boys as it should be because of the stress put on winning . . . I think the goal of Little League is to get out there, have the boys meet other boys, have fun, and to compete . . .

Just have a good time out there” (Fine, 1987).

Fine makes the distinction between work and fun. I suggest a slightly alternative distinction between competing and fun. This appears in the Sterling City Little League mission statement. It also emerges in how coaches manage their respective teams. Coach Jim recognized the two extremes when he said that some coaches “show up and you have fun, that's the biggest goal a kid should have. Should there be some of that?

Yeah, but if you take [another coaches] motto of 'You are here to win and if your parents have an issue about it, your parents can [go home]' (personal interaction, April 23, 2016). Returning to Bruce Lincoln's taxonomic approach can provide insight into how coaches handle this tension - Figure 6. Since Sterling City Little League's stated focus is on "fun", the taxonomy represents symbolic constraints that the research participants described when creating the outcome of a fun, competitive experience.

Figure 6 – Coaches Taxonomy of Experience



I asked Coach Scott about this balance:

"I don't know if it's a magic formula. You have to be able to kind of see the line of we're having too much fun right now and we've got to get back to being

competitive, or this isn't really fun right now. We got to figure out a way to make this fun, whether it's a fun practice, or a team outing, or something like that. We did a lot of just kind of random, fun team outings this year. We went to a college baseball game together” (personal interaction, July 26, 2016).

I remember coaching with Ted when our kids were thirteen. He used to bring a kickball to practice for the last thirty minutes. One time, on a hot day, he brought a sprinkler for the kids to cool off. This heightened the focus on getting through our work so that we could play. Sometimes a teachable, competitive moment may not be fun. Coach Patrick reminisced about teaching a lesson:

“I remember one game specifically, playing against Adam’s team when JP was 10. He was pitching and he threw a fast ball to the backstop. As he walked back to the mound and the catcher was trying to find his mask, I sent two guys home because they weren't paying attention. I remember Coach Adam talking to me about that a little bit. It's partially about learning. You have to pay attention all the time. If you get into a tournament, they're going to do that all the time. I didn't do it to rub it in, but if they are going to give you the opportunity, you should take advantage of it” (personal interaction, May 9, 2016).

This example was not fun for JP or the team. It was an innocent mistake by a ten year old. The twelve year olds on the other team made him learn a tough lesson. Some parents interpreted this as a lack of sportsmanship. Others interpreted it as teaching JP and his team a lesson about competing. While Coach Adam was one of the more

competitive coaches in Sterling City Little League, he regularly emphasized fun with his team:

“One of my questions was, ‘Why are you here, why are you playing baseball?’ I only wanted to hear one answer, truly. I instilled this in all of my players all the way through and by mid-year and end of the year when I asked that question they all knew what the answer should be - what I wanted to hear anyways. When we were playing 14 AA or 15 AAA , I still would ask my players that question and I wanted them to yell back at me, ‘I’m here to have fun coach’”
(personal interaction, May 30, 2015).

As the field-based director of the performance, coaches choreograph the balance of fun and competing within the constraints of culture, participation and rules.

Cultural Constraints

The Sterling City Little League mission and purpose stresses that “Little League should be FUN! The aim is to work towards being a competitive team rather than to win at all costs.” The intent is to be competitive and to have fun, but not so competitive that a coach would try to “win at all costs.” However, the Little League International mission does not include the word “fun” or “compete.” As stated earlier, the following is stated on its website:

“Through proper guidance and exemplary leadership, the Little League program assists children in developing the qualities of citizenship, discipline, teamwork and physical well-being. By espousing the virtues of character, courage and

loyalty, the Little League Baseball and Softball program is designed to develop superior citizens rather than superior athletes.”

There is little to no direction on how a coach can create a fun, competitive atmosphere that develops quality citizens and does not have a “win at all costs” mentality. I asked the participants about managing this balance. Coach Ted talked about the “everyone wins” philosophy:

“It goes back to the Little League state-of-mind, or the question of ‘do you want to win?’ Little League says, ‘Everybody plays, everybody gets a trophy at the end of the day. Everybody's a winner, no one's a loser.’ I'd hate to say at the age of 10, 11, or 12 that's the formula for what's going to happen later in life. If you just let everybody kind of skate through Little League, and okay, ‘The seasons over, thank you, here's your ribbon.’ ‘What did you learn?’ Maybe not that much. If you take that philosophy later in life, unfortunately, you're going to have a lot of failure in your life. They don't teach that too much” (personal interaction, April 23, 2016).

Coach Jim shared a story from when his son played T-ball:

“The kid grabbed the ball and tagged him out and I was one of the dads on the sidelines and the kid was standing on second and I said, ‘Come on over here.’ The coach said, ‘No, no, no, stay there.’ I said, ‘He was tagged out.’ She said, ‘Oh, no, we don't want kids to get out in baseball.’ I said, ‘It's baseball, its okay. It's not that he's a bad kid, he's just got to learn what getting tagged out means.’ That was a T-ball thing, but that was kind of the opposite end of the

competitiveness. You've got to learn the game, and part of the game is getting out and that isn't a terrible thing" (personal communication, April 29, 2016).

Coach Jim's son was his fourth kid to play baseball. He grew up learning the rules from his three older brothers. He eventually quit T-Ball because it did not resemble what "baseball" meant to him. Coach Jim said that being "competitive isn't a bad thing. I'm competitive, but I'm thinking of more competitive to winning at all costs" (personal communication, April 29, 2016). It seems that a mutually exclusive approach is not optimal. Too much emphasis on fun and baseball loses its essence. Too much emphasis on competing and coach may lack sportsmanship.

Player Participation

In addition to cultural constraints, coaches need to manage participation expectations. The Sterling City Little League mission statement states that "each player, at all levels, will be treated as fairly as possible within the substitution rule of Little League baseball and in consideration of his or her abilities." This reference is to the Little League International rule of minimum playing requirements. Local leagues, like Sterling City Little League, can create an additional layer of rules. Along with minimum playing requirements, coaches like Adam used meritocracy to build a competitive team:

"I played to win. My teams are going to play to win, but everybody was going to get their ups and everybody was going to get their chances. Kids were going to get rewarded when they practiced, when they did things [right]. . . . When you could tell one kid was practicing or doing things right you wanted to reward

them for taking the game seriously and I would do that” (personal communication, May 30, 2015).

What about the handful of kids with the least skills? Using Coach Adam’s approach, these kids would get the least amount of playing time. Is that fun? Coach Ryan remembers coaches struggling with being competitive and making sure all the kids participated:

“There were some coaches that only cared about winning, even when they were coaching seven and eight year olds. There were coaches that didn't care about winning at all when they were coaching kids who were eleven and twelve. These coaches probably should have worried a little bit more about it. We did see the people that struggled with trying to get every kid in the game more. One of the pieces of advice I was given was to go and get the biggest lead you can so that you can play everybody. That was from someone that really wanted to win all the time” (personal communication, June 6, 2016).

So it seems that participation is part of fun. If a kid is always sitting on the bench so that the team can win, how does the kid have fun? Coach Adam asked the questions, “What if you’re not a competitive team? What if you’re going out there and getting blown out every day?” (Personal interaction, May 30, 2015). From a league perspective, what happens if you have a league with six teams and three managers are trying to win and three managers are trying to ensure every kid gets to participate? Different objectives will produce different results. I can tell you that it is not fun losing. The better athletes on a team begin resenting the kids with less skills when you put them in and they make

an error. Both sets of parents get upset as well. One parent is mad that you are not playing their kid. Another parent is mad that you are playing the higher skilled kids too often.

Coach Perspectives on Rules

Baseball is a game of rules. Sometimes the rules are to secure a minimum level of participation. Other times, the rules are to enable sportsmanship, safety and competition. Coach Kirk suggested that the “rules that came directly from Little League International tended to be more on the philosophical side of things probably as a result of feedback or political trends or whatever. Something more nebulous than what actually would happen on a field on any given day in the summer in [Sterling City]” (personal interaction, May 14, 2016). One of the coaches that I highly respected was “tired of losing” to Star City. Their coaches used to do a double steal which confused his pitcher and infielders. This can be a difficult maneuver for a team to defend. This Little League coach taught his team the double steal in order to compete against Star City. He then started using the tactic against Sterling City Little League teams and won first place that year. Part of his success was from talent development and part of it was using tactics such as the double steal that was within the rules, but not necessarily aligned to the intention of fun and sportsmanship. The rules are a constraint that keeps coaches honest and when enforced correctly, can assist with creating healthy competition.

Little League International issues a rule book each year. Mandatory play is an example of a rule. According to the Sterling City Little League web site, “each player at the Majors level must play a minimum of 6 defensive outs and bat at least 1 time per

game.” It is more complicated for the Minors division which includes infield / outfield playing requirements. In addition, “No player may sit out a second inning until all players on their team have sat out at least one complete inning.” The purpose of these rules is to ensure that a kid does not sit on the bench the whole game. Coaches use their discretion when substituting bench players for role players to meet the requirement and to facilitate a fun, competitive experience.

Rules can protect players from failure or enable competition. The ten run rule is an example. Once a team is ahead by ten runs or more after four complete innings, the game is over. This mitigates the risk of a team losing too badly. Coach Mark consistently argued against this rule:

“I think that's one rule that's more of a cultural rule I argued against ten run rule and I just said, ‘Kids should play.’ Baseball is a game of failure and it's a good learning experience. When they get older they're going to be under these rules anyways. I was on the board and they wanted the ten run rule because it's humiliating to the losing team and they just want to stop playing anyways. They just want to go home. I just said, ‘First of all, the game isn't about the parents, it's about the kids.’ We had a game where we played the best South team and we were a mediocre National team. They were drubbing us. It was like fifteen runs in the fourth inning or something like that. So I asked my players, ‘How many of you would like to quit playing even though we're getting beat pretty bad?’ Nobody raised their hand. ‘How many want to continue playing?’ They all

raised their hand. I think from that point on we played and I said, 'Okay, let's start the game over from now in our mind'" (personal interaction, May 7, 2016).

Another protective rule was stealing home. The date of June 1st was made famous within Sterling City Little League as this was the first day that Major league teams could steal home on a ball that got by the catcher. Even though the team began play in late April, the idea was that each team would have four to five weeks to develop pitchers and catchers to defend the steal of home. Coach Irwin did not like this rule:

"I never liked that stealing rule. If we're teaching the kids the game of baseball, then let's teach them the game of baseball. If you're not ready for them to steal home, then you have another practice and you figure it out - just coach better" (personal interaction, May 15, 2016).

Coach Kirk thought about this from the parent's perspective:

"I would think that the parents who have the kids that wouldn't be as good skills wise might have more of a less competitive philosophy. They might say, 'Stealing home is one of those things where we need time to learn during the season.' Coaches need time during the season to develop the skill so that no one is caught off guard and we have time to prepare for that on both offense and defense. That to me seems fine" (personal interaction, May 5, 2016).

Then he thought about the competitive side. He questioned how much the rules should change to accommodate an experience that is fun or not oriented to failure:

"The other side of me would just say, 'Hey, if we want to resemble the game at its highest level, then that is a part of the game.' How much are you going to

really modify or truncate or abridge somehow the sport in the name of it being at a certain age level? The other argument for that is a slippery slope. As soon as you say, 'Well, you can steal home but not until July 1st or something.' When are we going to get to the point where 5 balls is a walk instead of 4? Or if you follow off the third strike on a bunt, that's not an out, that's just a fouled hit or something like that?" (personal interaction, May 14, 2016).

Rules regarding age also constrain a coach's ability to be competitive. The Majors level is ten to twelve years old. In 2007, Little League International issued an edict that all twelve year olds must play at the major level. This irritated Sterling City Little League and many other leagues. Coach Kirk suggested that "you're a local Little League and you're scratching your head trying to figure out, 'Great. Look what corporate came up with.' You don't want to be in a position as a local league to try to find a way to run your league in a way that sidesteps or outright breaks a rule that it comes down from the highest" (personal interaction, May 14, 2016). Leagues through the district began to redesign their formats to deal with the new rule. A common approach, and one used by Sterling City Little League, was to create two Major level divisions, one with the best players and one with the twelve year olds that should not be at the Majors level for safety or competitive reasons. Cities that did not reorganize their Majors level division struggled at district tournaments.

Safety rules also play into this dynamic. When Gary Fine conducted his study of Little League in the 1970s, he cited safety as a concern (Fine, 1987). Little League has made tremendous strides over the years to improve player safety. One example is the

pitch count which was implemented in 2009. With this rule, a pitcher cannot exceed 85 pitches per game and includes mandatory days of rest. The intent is to protect the arms of young pitchers. Coach Mark remembers when the rule was implemented:

“As a coach I had to learn how to manage within that. In one way it made it easier on the coaches because it's the sixth inning and your pitcher's doing well, but you know he's getting tired and it's time for him to get out. ‘I'm sorry, but you've reached eighty-five pitches and I have no choice. You have to come out of the game.’ I remember pulling my son Jesse out of a baseball game tournament. He was mad at me” (personal interaction, May 7, 2016).

Like other rules, the pitch count rule was implemented to protect kids. Although Coach Adam was proud that Sterling City Little League volunteered to be a pilot program for this rule, he said that some coaches were not happy as they now had a constraint that limited their ability to overpitch their best players.

In this chapter, I used Goffman's theories of dramaturgical analysis and impression management as a way to understand the challenges faced by parent coaches. Using participant data, managing favoritism and balancing the sometimes conflicting priorities of “competing” and “fun” emerged as the top challenges. As the field-based director of the performance, the parent coach develops scripts to project a “front stage” presentation that does not show favoritism. Choreography includes making an example of one's child, spoiling opportunities and record keeping. Within Little League, coaches face cultural, participation, and rule constraints when delivering a fun, competitive experience. In the post schism environment, these constraints made it

more difficult for the Little League coach to “compete” with the Traveling organization as the top baseball program in Sterling City.

CHAPTER SIX: The Origin and Practices of Coaches

The last two chapters revealed the competitive context in which youth baseball exists in Sterling City since the schism, and how coaches manage perceived favoritism and sometimes polarized objectives. The “moral career” of a coach is abundant with making mistakes and recognizing continuous improvement opportunities. Earlier, I described my coaching journey as “becoming a coach.” Like many parent coaches, I started out as an ambitious volunteer, quickly recognizing my lack of readiness for the role. Not all coaches begin their role at the same point of reference. Some bring to their journey a deep background in baseball, while others excel at communication or talent management. Some coaches sit quietly and do not engage in the “drama” of the game. Others yell and scream at kids. Why are there different coach types? What factors contribute to how a coach develops their personal style and practices? The focus on this chapter is to address these questions. Becoming a coach type is based on the coach’s ongoing development and commitment to the role, and their interpretation of what it means to “compete” and “have fun.”

Overview of Coach Recruiting & Development

Sterling City Little League assigns approximately one hundred coaches each year to support baseball operations. There are typically three coaches per team, one designated as the manager and the other two as assistants. Administrative and baseball duties are spread throughout the coaching trio based on a number of factors including coach preference, strengths and scheduling logistics. At one point, I was responsible for coach recruiting and development. Some coaches would contact me months before the

season to let me know their intentions. Some I could count on seeing at registration or tryouts. I was always short by about twenty to thirty coaches and needed to make phone calls. My objective was to pair up experienced coaches with newer coaches to reduce the anxiety of those that “did not know about baseball.” I became an expert at overcoming objections such as “I work a lot and do not have enough time.” “Don’t worry,” I would say, “I’ve paired you up with couple guys that also work. You three can work out your schedules once you meet.” As a last resort, I would tell potential coaches that “they could watch less television and really contribute to helping their community.” I also became a matchmaker, pairing people that would become best friends outside of baseball. There were times when I failed miserably, aligning the wrong personalities and approaches, even for my own team. It is important to note that the Sterling City Little League coach is a volunteer role. Coaches commit to hours of games, practices and league meetings. Most work full-time jobs and juggle this responsibility admirably. There is intrinsic value to being a youth sports coach, but there is a thankless part to the job, especially if your team is losing and the parents are unsettled.

After recruiting, the next step is to develop coaches. Training was mostly focused on skills such teaching a kid to hit, field and throw. Historically, coach development was not a strength of Sterling City Little League. Coach Irwin and Coach Paul had moderate success testing the idea of coaching clinics. Then Coach Irwin developed a coach certification program. Coach Tom remembers how he felt about the program:

“It was fabulous, I still tell people about the program. When I talk to guys who are coaching baseball or are getting into coaching baseball, I say, ‘Go find a coaches coach. Get your league to pay for it because it's invaluable. Because if you've played baseball that doesn't mean you know how to coach baseball’”
(personal interaction, April 23, 2016).

Coach Tom felt bad because he used to have kids “swing a bat against a ball fifty times in practice,” whereas he learned to use tools such as whiffle balls and PVC pipe (personal interaction, April 23, 2016). Now that a coach like Tom has been recruited and participated in skill development, what are the attributes of effectiveness?

Attributes of an Effective Coach

Within the post schism, competitive context of Sterling City youth baseball, the coaches interviewed for this study described three attributes of an effective coach. The first is the ability to relate to others. This includes kids, parents, other coaches, umpires and administrators. The second is the ability to leverage rules. To do this, a coach needs to not only understand the rules, but also be able to apply the rules during games. This coach competes through a better strategy. Finally, an effective coach can assess and develop talent.

Relating to Others

Communication and driving player engagement were identified as essential relational skills. When Coach Paul was President of Sterling City Little League, he remembers that some of the coaches “could relate to the kids, some of them couldn't.” He believes that the components of relating to others include effective communication

and the ability to engage the team. Coach Doug suggested that a great coach focuses “his energy on the players . . . communicat[ing] with the team so everybody shows up and the parents are feeling like they're getting a good shake” (personal communication, July 25, 2016). Communication is also about setting expectations with the parents. Coach Patrick thinks that “communication with families and parents is the most important thing to have a successful coaching job” (personal communication, May 9, 2016). My older son was on Coach Patrick’s team when he was twelve. I remember the parent meeting with Coach Patrick. He talked about everyone’s job:

“Yeah, coaches’ coach, players play, and parents cheer. I still believe it today.

It's a good thing to say and I actually even used this analogy the other day.

Somebody was trying to do a presentation on something on the screen, and three people were telling him how to fix it at one time. I said, ‘You know, when I coached Little League, and there's a seven year kid up to bat, and four people are all telling him what to do in a millisecond, and they are all different, what you think they do? They freeze, so just be quiet, and let it happen, or let one person speak.’ I told them, ‘If I'm the coach, then let me coach. If you don't like something I am doing, don't coach over me on the field, come talk to me and we can talk about it’” (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

Managing perceived favoritism and facilitating a fun, competitive experience in youth baseball game involves interacting with the team and parents, often resulting in communication issues. Sometimes this happens front stage, when a parent yells at a

coach during a game, or a coach yells a player or umpire. The more common experience is back stage by way of an informal meeting, email or phone call.

As a field-based director, a coach is often aware of things about a player that their parents and audience are not. A coach spends numerous hours at practice and pre-game warm ups back stage. This gives the coach an opportunity to witness behavior and performance trends. That can lead to a stage collision. Coach Irwin described an incident he had with a parent:

“I got a call from the dad saying, ‘How come he’s not playing?’ ‘Well, [tell him to] come to practice. He’ll get better and then guess what, he’ll get to play more.’ I said, ‘He hasn’t been in practice. He’s been to the games, he just hasn’t never been to practice in 2 weeks.’ ‘You’re kidding.’ ‘No.’ He’s like, ‘Okay. Sorry I bothered you.’ That was the end of it” (personal interaction, May 15, 2016).

The parent had a front stage expectation without have back stage information. That is a collision point for a coach. Sometimes it is about communication. Coach Mark described a situation where he had a communication challenge with a parent:

“Then I had another parent that called me up. I think when I was coaching Majors. I can't remember if it was Brandon or Jesse but the mother was all upset about her kid. To compete, I played six kids the whole game and six kids that half the game. The mother called and she's all upset that I took her son out of the game and she said, ‘His grandmother came to watch him.’ I go, ‘I didn't know grandma was there,’ I said, ‘I don't really take that into consideration.’ The kid's

mother kind of said, 'Oh that makes sense.' I still remember that" (personal communication, May 7, 2016).

Coach Mark had a process for balancing playing time and competing. Six kids played the whole game. Six kids played half the game. He did not communicate this to the parents. On the other hand, the parent had a front stage expectation that her kid would play the whole game since the grandmother was visiting. This is collision point between the coaches back stage strategy and the parents expectation for front stage performance. I had an experience during an all-star tournament where I played one kid the minimum number of innings and at bats. My intent was to win the tournament game. I found out after the game that it was his birthday. His father was so angry that he has not talked to me since that game.

Goffman describes what he calls performance disruptions as when "the reality sponsored by the performers is threatened. The persons present are likely to react by becoming flustered, ill at ease, embarrassed, nervous, and the like. Quite literally, the participants may find themselves out of countenance" (Goffman, 1959). He identifies tactical ways to avoid disruptions. And, a protective practice known as controlling "access to the back and front regions of a performance" (Goffman, 1959). When coaching collides with parent expectations, it may not be the team's fault. It may also have nothing to do with the region of performance. In the youth baseball context, it seems to be related to communication effectiveness, transparency and expectations. A great example of a performance disruption is when a parent perceives that the coach is favoring his own child when the kid plays a preferred positions the whole game.

However, it may simply be due to the fact that two strong players missed the game to attend a band concert. When parents have limited information or unrealized expectations, they may confront the coach. Coaches like Mark and Tom will respond with back stage facts. Effectively communicating with parents is a key element of relatability.

Engagement is also key to relating to others. Coach Adam said, “Some coaches are so serious that the fun gets rubbed out of it. It probably happened to me sometimes where I would get so caught up in the moment that I would lose sight that this is kids playing a game and I’m sure that happened to me but I would always try and get my bearings” (personal interaction, May 30, 2015). Coach Mark suggested that “the opposite spectrum is the guy that basically is sitting on the bench the whole game and lets the kids do whatever” (personal interaction, May 7, 2016). Disengagement can be difficult for the kids. There are also coaches that are overly competitive. Coach Jim described the “angry coach” as one that gets “angry at the kids if we don't win . . . and angry if they don't perform” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

Yelling at kids is a practice of a coach that has difficulty relating to kids. Over the years, Coach Ted learned this lesson:

“You really can't yell at a kid that's ten and eleven years old because they don't understand what they're getting yelled at about - ‘I thought we were just playing baseball.’ I've found out that talking slower is much better than yelling at everyone. I've learned that you can instruct these kids as a group, but the best way to explain to a kid is by himself, off to the side. Maybe either after the

inning or at the end of practice, starting with a very positive note. ‘You did great, your base running was great. You hit the cut-off guy and you caught the ball today with 2 hands. Now, what did you do wrong?’ Try to get them real high, then try to slowly explain to him what you'd like to see him do better” (personal communication, April 23, 2016).

Coach Doug and Coach Jim have over thirty years of combined experience. Both of them have umpiring experience and have gained new insights about themselves and about how coaches relate to kids. Coach Jim reminisced about his communication:

“Some coaches are real quiet when they talk to the kids. I was so much more vocal. They must have just thought I was an [jerk] based on how I was always talking, encouraging the kids. I was doing the inner language for them.

‘Outfielders, remember, as soon as you get the ball just throw it in. Doesn’t matter where you throw it.’ Instead of just standing there and holding the ball, you know, things like that. Just try to ingrain in them some of the fundamental stuff” (personal communication, April 29, 2016).

Coach Doug notices that some coaches don’t “know the kids have to learn things. They don't grant a learning curve to the kids so they're all over the kids for doing something wrong when in reality the coach hasn't learned how to teach them to do it right” (personal interaction, July 27, 2016). He suggests that these coaches will yell at the kid and not yell at the umpire because they are not strong enough. Effective coaches relate to all the stakeholders in the youth baseball experience.

Talent Management

Coaches are talent managers. They need to assess talent and determine at a player level how to develop skills. This can be especially difficult for a new coach.

Coach Tom remembers when he started coaching:

“Just all of the things, I didn't know how to teach baseball. I mean there were a few things that I knew. I didn't do any research on how to teach kids to swing or teach kids to field, or anything like that. When they're 7, 8 or 9, they're just trying to keep the glove on their hand and hit the ball off the tee, right?”

(personal interaction, April 23, 2016).

Practices are key part of development. Some coach are hands on and essentially play with the kids to show them the mechanics. Coach Ted used to tell his players that “you play like you practice.” He also distinguished the “old school coach whose players did tons of standing around and learned very little for the time they spent there” (personal interaction, April 23, 2016). Coach Ryan agrees that a good coach teaches through “drills and keeping kids moving, not sitting around” (personal interaction, June 11, 2015).

Learning opportunities also happen during games. Coach Jim would give kids an opportunity when he was ahead in the score:

“I put a kid out there to pitch and we were ahead by 3 or 4 runs. I wanted to give him a chance and he walked the first guy. The guy he walked ran to first and kept going to second and that was it, the kid was done. It got in his head and we had to take him out. That's okay, because you've got to pay attention, you've

got to know that, but the thing I always tried to figure out is, at what age should kids be ready for stuff like that? They're 9. Should they be ready for that level of competition? Or is that 13?" (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

Sometimes during a game, a coach needs to make a decision on whether or not to leave a kid in a position to fail. Coach Tom reminded me of a story of a game that I coached:

"There are coaches that I think are more interested in developing kids. It's not that the coaches who want to win don't want kids to develop, but they're more focused on putting the kids in that can be successful now rather than putting kids in a situation where they can become successful. There's an example of, I can't even remember the guy's name, Ben. He was a pitcher, and we were playing against a team that you were coaching. He had been kind of an average pitcher, up until we had loaded the bases with one out, and he buckled down and struck out the next two guys or something like that and you saw a change in him. If you don't leave him in there to figure out how to do it, but some coaches won't do that, they'll be like, 'Hey you loaded the bases, there's two outs, I'm going to bring in the next guy to get them out'" (personal interaction, April 23, 2016).

In order to be an effective developer of kids, coaches need to be positive. Some coaches are angry and yell at the kids. Some are even mean. Coach Doug suggests that "the coaches who are just focused and positive focused and the energy is good, those are kind of the best ones for the kids" (personal interaction, July 25, 2016).

What about the idea that kids may be afraid of the performance of playing baseball? How can a coach develop confidence in a ten year old? Coach Kent suggests:

“Here's another thing. Here are some of my general principles. One of them is having kids play scared, and I will tell you in general it is not productive. That's one of my edicts if you will. Here's what I mean. You may be able to take a 16, 17, 18 year old, who's batting last in the order, and move him up and say ‘Today we're going to bat you at 3rd, okay? We're going to give you 2 games with this.’ They know ‘Oh [dang], I better really perform now if I want to keep my spot.’ That may work. The lower you go in age, the less effective that is, and I believe that. I think if a 10 year old is feeling pressure to perform, because of things like playing time and batting order, it will not be a motivator. I think that they fear it. They are not old enough to look it at as a motivator, and I think it only has the opposite effect” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

Encouragement is also a key to developing a kid to be successful. Coach Jim shared a story about how he encouraged a kid:

“There was a game we were in with Andy, and Andy was an okay hitter and stuff, but it was a huge game. It was the championship game. He came up to bat, bases loaded, and I called him over to the side before he went up to bat and I told him, ‘No matter what happens I want you to know I'm proud of you.’ I'd been coaching a while and I said, ‘Don't worry about it, and don't stress this out, okay? It's a tie game right now, and if you get a hit it's going to be a lot of fun, and if you don't, don't worry about it.’ He went up and he just smoked one

down the line and came around to third base, and he's standing right at third base and everyone's cheering, the place is going crazy and the game ended right when he got there because the last run had scored and we had won the game. I went up to him and said, 'This is why people play baseball at every level. This is why Joe Mauer plays baseball, because of the feeling you have right now, that's what it's all about. Just enjoy it and have fun. Those games where you strike out and you feel so bad, think of this. That's what it's all about'" (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

Given that Majors level coaches in Little League select their teams, the ability to assess talent is critical for coaches to compete. An experienced coach may be more capable at this skill than a new coach. There are two processes whereby this is most evident, tryouts and the draft. There are numerous ways to conduct these processes. Tryouts typically occur by age group. For example, the ten year old group would meet at a field as a cohort. This group would be split into drills such as hitting, fielding and throwing. A group of kids would take ground balls in the infield, while another group takes fly balls in the outfield. Coaches sit in the dugout or on the sidelines scoring kids based on a pre-determined ranking system. These scores are then used at the draft. When I was President of Sterling City Little League, we met at the local recreation center to select teams. The draft order was based on drawing names out of a hat for the Minors division and the previous season's results for the Majors division. For the Majors, the last place team would select first and the first place team would select last. All other teams would select based on the order of how the teams finished the previous

season. It quickly became clear each year that the results of each team were dependent on the ability of the coach to assess talent at the tryout and draft processes. Coach Mark said that he “wasn't successful all the time, but knew the team was going to be good because . . . many of the coaches didn't know a lot of the kids” (personal interaction, May 7, 2016). Coach Jim remembered his first draft:

“I remember the first time I ever went to a draft, we're going around the table and they're saying, 'Jim, you're up next,' and I had a list of kids and Joe said, 'Take this kid, he's great.' I'd say, 'Really?' He'd say, 'Sure.' That first team I had was [not talented] and I was so mad at those guys” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

I saw this happen numerous times. At one draft, we had a new coach of the previous year's last place team. He made the first selection. The room was silent. We could not believe it. In retrospect, I wish had called a time-out and helped this coach. His additional selections did not help and his team struggled throughout the year. At another draft, we had a player who was twice as big as some of the other players. He hit fifteen home runs that year. All the coaches were jealous of the coach who had the first pick. This one kid would help his team compete. To everyone's surprise, the coach with the first pick made a different selection. Coach Ted had the second pick. I will never forget the look of disbelief on his face. He took the player and competed for first place that year. Coach Ryan thinks that problems can also happen at the bottom of the draft:

“I think at the bottom of the draft is where coaches second guess what they did. I guess some teams made what some people would think are silly first or second draft picks but I think that the bottom is where the mistakes probably got made the most” (personal interaction, June 11, 2015).

This is a time when coaches may draft a ten year old instead of a twelve year old. The ten year old may not contribute much their first year, but there is motivation for the coach. Coach Ryan talked about legacy players: “The Majors, the system that Sterling City Little League has used is the same system that many other Little Leagues have used having legacy players so a child gets drafted at 10 or 11, they automatically go back to the same team the next year” (personal interaction, June 11, 2015). So instead of taking an eleven or twelve year old, the coach will draft for the future.

The tryout and draft processes are also a challenge for the Minors division.

Coach Ryan remembers a Minors draft:

“I never liked the draft process for Minors. I thought there were too many kids to try to go sit through tryout and draft because you had . . . like 10 teams. There's 130 kids or 150 kids and I don't think the draft process was every fair in those deals. Some coaches would go get their coaching staff and they would have their first three picks and their first three picks would probably would have gone in the first round. They stack their team and so the person who didn't have the knowledge of the kids really took a beating” (personal communication, June 11, 2015).

The ideal is to create competitively balanced teams. Coach Pete remembers that there was not an “emphasis on spreading out talent. . . There was an emphasis on hoarding talent. It was okay to have . . . one team that would go 16-0, and it was acceptable to have one team that was 0-16” (personal interaction, June 26, 2016). Coach Kent and Coach Pete created a new tryout process in 2011 that significantly improved the competitive balance of the Minors division in Sterling City Little League. The process was to identify a select group of coaches that would rate the players. They would then assign a score to each kid and conduct a “blind draft” whereby teams are built based on ratings assigned to each kid. While this process was not perfect, it mitigated the risk of the dependency of the coach making good decisions.

Parent coaches can also develop kids by modeling perspective and maturity for those in a baseball community. Coach Irwin offered a point of view about puberty:

“Right. I mean, I look at Blake and I look at him when he was 12 playing for the Majors and he was probably middle of the team. I don't know, maybe below middle. He was definitely a good teammate. He played by the game, just a great nice kid that everyone would like on their team who tried hard. That’s really all you can ask for. He grew in Legion Ball where he was the first baseman because he was the tallest kid on the team but he was able to throw the ball 85 miles an hour and never was a pitcher. Eventually it clicked. I mean, with some kids, it happens early like JP [Coach Adam’s son] because JP was athletic at 12 whereas Blake wasn’t. Now, Blake is athletic. I mean, you’d never call him a superstar

athlete because he's just not into it but he definitely has the skill sets have now"
(personal communication, May 15, 2016).

Parents and coaches do not always take individual growth of a child into account when managing their level of commitment of the sport. I coached many kids whose parents were planning for high school and college when the kid was seven years old.

Unfortunately, the child grew to develop other interests and a body that was conducive to other sports. Taking the long view with kids based on individual development is a way for parent coaches to be role models for their own child and all those involved with the sport. Coach Patrick suggested that the game itself provides perspective:

"Winning and losing are part of life, and I think sharing some of those experiences together is good actually, because you know, outside of sports, we don't win or lose together, in the same way that we would. It's important to lose together. It's important to be a good sport, and to say you tried your best, but today it didn't work out" (personal communication, May 9, 2016).

Learning through observing the behavior of a coach can be as significant as learning how to steal a base. Coach Kent described a role model:

"I think you have an invested interest in the team, and your child, in seeing them succeed. You can have a direct role in that. Now success, I would say is beyond just the wins and losses. You have an opportunity to show your child and other children, what you feel is important, and then the ability to stress that through coaching" (personal communication, Apr. 29, 2015).

One of Kent's assistant coaches shared an experience of how Kent acted on his description of a role model:

"I remember Kent offered a really nice lesson for me at the end of our first year of Little League. We had a play at the end of a game where the umpire made a bad call. Kent was at first base, and he meant to say something to the umpire. I saw him walk up, because he and everybody knew it was the wrong call. He was going to say something, and he stopped. He didn't say anything. He paused, and then he exited the field. Later, we had our team party at the bowling alley since it was our last game. [Kent] was socializing, and I was socializing. Later we had a quiet moment, and I asked him about that moment. 'Why didn't you say something? Were you going to say something?' He said, 'I was. I had to hold myself back. I didn't want to be that guy. That dad who publicly is arguing with a kid umpire over a seven-year-old baseball game. That was important to me'" (personal communication, June 26, 2015).

Coach Kent's decision to take the high road with the youth umpire set an example of sportsmanship for the parents in the stands and players in both dugouts. This single decision provided a development opportunity for all involved. In addition, Coach Kent had to balance the need to represent the parents in keeping the umpires honest and to be a role model for the kids. He maintained what Goffman called role discipline for front stage, a way to preserve the performance.

Baseball Intelligence (Leveraging Rules)

An effective coach knows the game of baseball. I am defining “leveraging rules” as the ability to use knowledge and strategy to compete. Coaches create offensive and defensive strategies to maximize the talent of their team. Some coaches bring this knowledge to the game given their previous experience. Others learn in the role. Coach Greg has been with Sterling City Little League for almost forty years. He said, “Some are not particularly knowledgeable. Some are not knowledgeable and then begin to learn. They may help out and become [an] assistant” (personal interaction, July 22, 2016). Typically, coaches start when their child is five to seven years old. The lower leagues are less competitive and more structured, allowing coaches to learn the game. Once a coach reaches the Majors division level, they need to increasingly develop strategies to compete. Coach Kent recognized what he called the “nuance stuff . . . that is beyond my general knowledge” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

On the offensive side, the lineup is a great example. A coach with twelve kids has to determine the order in which the kids will bat. The ability to score runs is a function of how well the coach assesses the players and assigns the batting order. A coach will often miss players due to school concerts, family vacations and sickness. If the best hitter is missing, how does the coach rearrange the line up? From a defensive stand point, an example is position assignments. Given rules such as mandatory play and pitch count guidelines, how does a coach effectively assign players to each position, inning by inning? This also is a function of the coach’s ability to assess talent and understand the physical and mental requirements of each position. Coaches also have

to balance their knowledge of the game with the expectations of players and parents. Some parents push coaches for playing their kid in a certain position. This is a challenge for coaches who know that the kid might not be ready. Coach Ted once talked to a parent and kid about being a pitcher:

“I can remember many instances where parents said, ‘My kid is such a good pitcher in the backyard.’ Yep. Now wait until he gets the uniform on and he steps out on that field, 47 feet away from home plate and there's, I don't know, maybe 50 people standing at the fence, and there's kids screaming. Babe Ruth is up and he's 6 feet tall at the age of 12, and you go, ‘Hmm, now what do I do? Now, what are you going to do? Are you sure you want to be a pitcher at this particular moment in your life?’” (personal interaction, April 23, 2016).

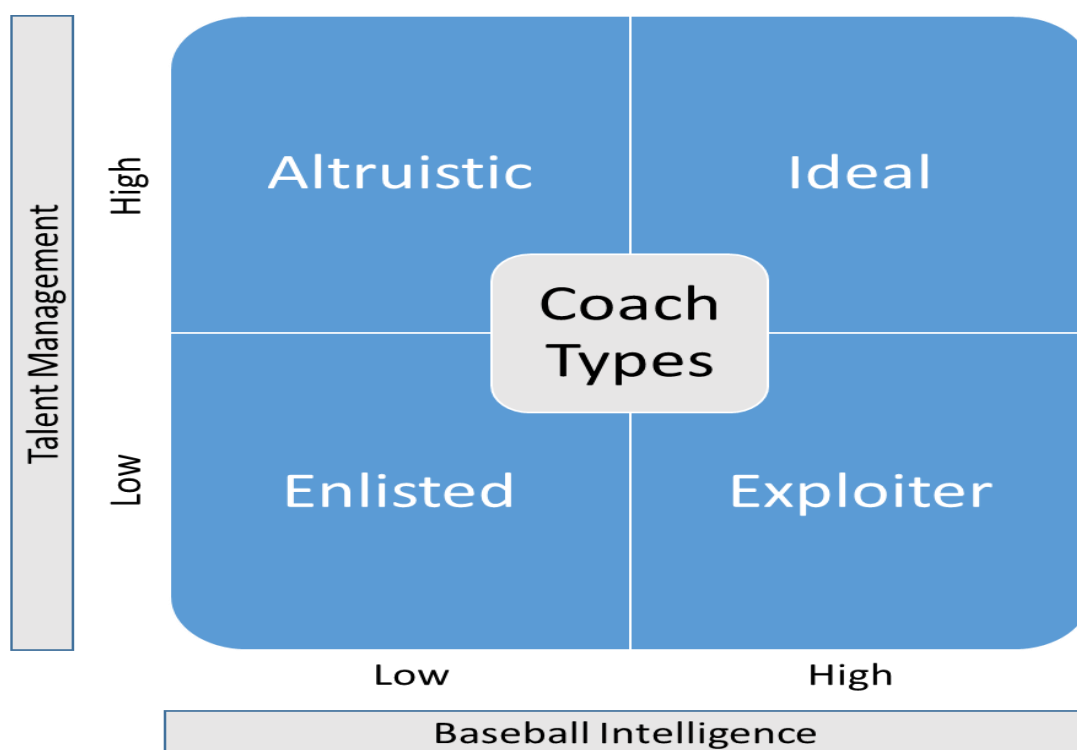
Questions such as when to substitute players and how to allocate pitchers over a week of games face coaches when it comes to the strategy of being competitive. It also means developing some of what Goffman (1961) might suggest as “moral career” rules. Coach Patrick suggested that when you are beating a team “14-1, you don’t steal second base” (personal interaction, May 9, 2016). It is within the rules to steal a base regardless of score. So when does a coach not leverage rules, compete and display sportsmanship? That depends on the coach type.

Dynamic Model for Coach Types

Coaches of varying degrees of experience and expertise are faced with the challenge of directing the performance of a baseball team. Achieving the goals of having fun and competing can be daunting. Given the meaning that coaches bring to

the stage, and the attributes of effective coaching, managing this tension produces four coach types: enlisted, altruistic, exploiter and ideal (Figure 7). I developed this model based on the perspectives of the research participants. Overall, the coaches agreed that the ability to relate to others is an essential requirement. The differentiating attributes, which are part of the model, are talent management and baseball intelligence.

Figure 7 – Dynamic Coaching Model



Enlisted

The enlisted coach type is one that is talked into the role as no one else was available. This coach probably regrets showing up to tryouts or answering the phone. Coach Doug said that these are the “coaches that are just out there because they got roped into it and take on the role grudgingly” (personal interaction, July 25, 2016). As

you can see from figure 7, this coach does not have baseball intelligence or the ability to assess and develop talent. The enlisted coach is not thinking about a fun or a competitive experience. They generally cannot wait for the season to be over. This happens because leagues sometimes struggle to fill all the coach positions. Coach Patrick remembers when he was recruiting coaches:

“I remember sending out an email that said ‘We have three teams, and two coaches. We will not play, unless somebody steps up to coach the third team.’ I think there are those kinds of coaches who are there just because nobody else would do it, and maybe they are too nice to say no, or they got co-opted into it”
(personal interaction, May 9, 2016).

It can be difficult to achieve a fun and competitive experience as an enlisted coach (or playing for one).

Exploiter

The exploiter coach type knows baseball, but does not have the skills or commitment to effectively assess and develop talent. This is the most challenging coach for a youth sports organization. This coach exploits the rules and generally disregards sportsmanship. When Coach Paul was the President of Sterling City Little League, he had a number of experiences with the exploiter coach type:

“They would exploit [rules] big time. There are some corners and valleys that if you're an aggressive coach, you can use those rules to your advantage and you can make another team look really bad and be very unsporting about it”
(personal communication, July 30, 2016).

The exploiter wants to “win at all costs,” even it means cheating. Coach Paul shared a story about how a coach handled the playoffs:

“The game prior, I was there at the field and all of a sudden they're short a player or two and there's a playoff game prior too, right? I'm saying, ‘Fine, get some subs,’ right? Boom, boom, they pull the two best guys off the team prior and I'm like, ‘Oh, my God. What did they just do to me here?’ I'm like, ‘No, no, no, no, no,’ right? You cannot do this” (personal interaction, July 30, 2016).

This coach was short players for his game. He chose two highly talented substitute players instead of following the substitution rules. Then the coach stopped sending emails to the parents of the players with the least baseball skills. If the weaker players do not show up for the game, you do not have to play them in the field or have them in the batting order. Cheating made his team more competitive.

The Urban dictionary describes the term bush league as “below good standards, not good, incorrect, pitiful and poor.” The term is generally used in sports to describe a lack of sportsmanship. Coach Paul told me another story about a coach who tried to take an effective pitcher out of a game:

“We were playing a game one time. The coach had the pitcher beam [throw a pitch at a batter] Nick Jones when he was batting because he was pitching a great game. The kid's crying on the way to first base. He gets up to first base and he's still crying. He steps off the base, they give him some time. [Coach] Brad yells out of the dugout, ‘If you take him out of the game he can't pitch.’ They beamed him on purpose to try to hurt him so he couldn't pitch the rest of

the game. All the parents went nuts on that one. If you put in a pinch runner, if you take him out, he cannot go back in pitching” (personal communication, July 30, 2016).

Coach Jim pointed out how the lack of sportsmanship or bush league play would trickle down to the players:

“What frustrated me is when some coaches were so competitive that it was having a detrimental impact on my players. Their kids would be bad mouthing the other players and I would expect the coach to stop that, because to me sportsmanship was the highest priority. Some of our kids would start going, ‘Oh, these kids can't hit the ball,’ and I'd right away confront that. I'd say, ‘Come on guys’” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

He also pointed out how coaches would take “advantage of the weakness of a player's skill to run up the score” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016). One example was a team that bunted the ball numerous times because the other team could not defend the bunt. The exploiter coach scored ten runs in row by bunting and stealing bases.

The exploiter also seeks retribution. They may have been wronged in the past and will exploit a situation to get even. Coach Irwin shared a story about another coach:

“I ended up getting in an argument with another coach because they started stealing on us and they were up by twenty one runs and they're stealing. I'm like, ‘You're going to steal?’ He's like, ‘Well, yeah.’ I'm like, ‘Why?’ He got to the point where his parents on his team were mad. I'm like, ‘What are you doing? Stop it.’ I mean, we've beaten this team all year long. He didn't like losing and it

was the only loss his team had was against my team. I had basically conceded. I waved the white flag. I'm like, let's get the game over with so we can go home" (personal interaction, May 15, 2016).

Another example is when Coach Kirk was tired of losing to Coach Brad. At the end of the season, he decided to intentionally walk Coach Brad's best hitter. Although this is in the rules, I have only heard of this happening one time in my ten years of Little League involvement. This was the last game of the year and this players last at bat in Little League given that he was twelve. Here is what happened:

"I don't know if this was true but Kirby's mom was in tears because, 'We have to let just the kids play. Let them bat.' I had enough of [Coach] Brad's nonsense and I had had enough of just getting our brains beat out. I bring up this story because that was on occasion which I used a mechanism of the game of baseball to how it's done in the Major leagues. The intentional walk is just like the steal of home or leading off or anything like that. It's a thing in baseball. It's what you can employ. It's what I chose to employ that one time and only that one time" (personal interaction, May 14, 2016).

Altruistic

The altruistic coach type is a nice coach. They communicate well and intend to equally develop life and baseball skills. This coach does not have the instincts for the game and cannot leverage rules in a way to be fully competitive. Coach Adam suggested that this coach type was the nicest "guy in the world, the best meaning person in the world but . . . winning was not the main thing. Making sure all the kids

participated, making sure all the kids got to participate equally across the board regardless of skill was the priority” (personal interaction, May 30, 2015). Coach Kirk describes the altruistic coach as non-competitive:

“This is the coach whose philosophy is more like this isn’t so much about the actual sport of baseball. This isn’t actually so much about winning or losing or even keeping score or when in the season are we allowed to steal home. It’s more of like this is a communal activity in which we are engaging in as human beings to further the civil harmony of society. There are the coaches who are really only more broadly interested in just having something to do in the summer, community service being out on the ball field” (personal interaction, May 14, 2016).

Coaches can bring their professional background to the baseball context. I know two coaches in particular that have child psychology and teaching backgrounds. They look for alignment between the age of the kids and the expectations. One stresses the “importance of helping children succeed, while being as fair as possible” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016). The other coach was concerned about younger kids playing with older kids:

“I didn't like pushing kids too fast. I didn't think it was appropriate for kids who were small in stature and immature emotionally to be with the older kids, the 12 year olds. I just saw how hard it was and how difficult it could be on the bench when you had the maturity level, and not just physically, but the emotional level

could be such, because some 12 year olds are pretty mature beyond their years”
(personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

The altruistic coach is aware of what is ideal for the kids and the community beyond the game of baseball.

Ideal

The ideal coach has all the attributes of an effective coach. Coaches in this category relate well to others, leverage rules in a non-exploitative way and develop the players. Coach Kirk believes that it is difficult to be an ideal coach:

“I think it’s a very tricky and delicate balance and I think that few people can actually pull it off. I would regard myself as a person who would not be able to pull that off. I would regard most people as not being able to pull that off. I think that bringing all that together is a very difficult thing to do. It requires a very unique charisma, strategy, and mentality. The right balance of all the qualities of all the different categories of coaches in the right amounts. I would say that the average Little League coach, the average person is not really all that capable or successful of putting that altogether” (personal interaction, May 14, 2016).

Nevertheless, I worked closely with one ideal coach. He developed kids first and leveraged rules second. This particular coach won first place three years in a row. He excelled at assessing talent and finding ways for kids to be valued. I asked Coach Kent about how he delivered a fun, competitive experience:

“Here's how I think you can do it. Start with the better players, maybe it's your own kid. You generally put these players in the most critical defensive positions. That doesn't mean that you can't have the other kids feel valued in what they are doing, and good about their job. If someone is playing in right field, and that's rotating or something, I'm making sure that they're feeling as good as they can about what they are doing. They want to come to practice, they want to come to games, because they feel that someone is invested in them. It's not just lip service” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

He worked very hard to find a place for each kid on the team. The ideal coach has a “good feel for who could play where, and assessing kids” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016). Coach Kent could watch the kids practice and find a way for them to contribute and be successful. While other coaches looked at their weakest players as liabilities, he would leverage the strengths of every player. Coach Kent also wanted to have a good relationship with the kids:

“I believe, especially with youth sports, helping the child succeed and feel good about themselves, is the most important thing. Having that approach, and winning are not necessarily exclusive. If I had a choice, you can win everything, but all the kids think you're an [jerk]. I wouldn't take it. That's not good for me” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016).

The model of coach types is dynamic. Even the ideal coach can have a bad day and act like an enlisted coach or an exploiter. Coach Scott was an ideal coach and got ejected from a game due to arguing with an umpire. Sometimes when coaches lose,

they will retreat to another type such as altruism to rationalize their shortcomings. Given the volunteer nature of the role and the number of coaches required, it is especially important that enlisted coaches develop into altruistic or ideal coaches.

The focus of this chapter was to explore how coaches evolve in their role and develop coaching practices. Coaches interpret what it means to balance the objectives of “fun” and “competing.” The interpretation manifests itself when coaches begin directing the baseball performance. If a coach does not have the attributes of effective coaching, the player and parent experience may not be optimal regardless of the team’s record. The ideal coach has all the attributes of an effective coach. This coach has the best chance for success in the post schism context of Sterling City youth baseball.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

I am grateful to the volunteer coaches that participated in this exploratory research. With their diverse styles and approaches, it was clear to me that they were deeply committed to kids having a good experience. Each coach learned how to teach baseball skills – that was the easy part. The hard part was how to interact with stakeholders, manage perceptions and balance conflicting priorities. The role of a volunteer coach is vital to the success of youth sports. More research needs to be conducted to better understand how to help coaches learn what Coach Kent called the “nuances” (personal interaction, April 29, 2016) of the role.

Conclusions

The Introduction of Competition into Youth Baseball

Historically, there was on one choice for youth baseball in Sterling City for children between the ages of five and twelve. Due to a schism within the baseball community, Sterling City parents now get to choose between Sterling City Little League and Sterling City Traveling Baseball.

This study demonstrates how discourse and myth can lead to social strain and change. A small group was highly dissatisfied with the status quo. Its members decided to rebel and create an alternative. The change in discourse was that the new alternative would be “competing at the highest level of competition.” The subsequent symbolic interpretations for development, rules & control, winning and commitment evolved, making the new program superior (Traveling) and the status quo program (Little League) inferior. As a result, Little League essentially became the local equivalent of a

recreational league. This distinction was represented in an earlier taxonomic analysis. Repeated attempts to bridge the schism have failed and continue to elude the two organizations.

The use of Lincoln's approach to analyzing community schisms was crucial in identifying the nature of the core disagreement and the reason it has resisted resolution. The power of myth was also explored. At its core, the taxonomic split in Sterling City was over the nature of youth sports and its role in facilitating player development. The ensuing symbols and rituals concerned what it means to grow up and how best to facilitate the development. In this case, Little League's lingering rituals and symbols complicated the post-schism landscape for its coaches. The seasonal ritual that precedes the tournament has become problematic since the birth of a clearly better caliber of play in Traveling. Despite the difficulty of attaining this goal, Sterling City Little League has remained committed to the myth. This commitment to the Little League World Series has resulted in competition between the two organizations even as it makes the Little League coaches jobs harder. The two programs compete for scarce resources, recruiting kids to strengthen their respective programs.

The Dramaturgy of the Parent Coach

The parent coach is the field-based director of the baseball "performance" in youth baseball (Goffman, 1959). With the role comes the need to manage front stage and back stage interactions of all the participants. What makes it especially difficult for coaches is to manage perceptions. Foremost is the perception of favoring one's own child. Why is this so important to coaches? Often, they experience an egregious

example of another coach doing just that. The experience is so bad that the coach commits to never being like “that coach.” Parent coaches may also have to deal with the challenge of having one of the better players on the team. In addition, there are advantages to the kid of a parent coach: getting to practice and games on time, and access to equipment and facilities.

To manage the perception of favoritism, coaches seem to deploy one of three approaches. Some coaches make an overt example of their kid. This proves to the parents and spectators that favoritism will not be tolerated. Other coaches spoil opportunities for their child. Even if their kid deserves to bat first, they do not. Then there is the coach that fastidiously keeps track of metrics. This coach can prove to any parent the reason for their kids positions in the batting order or playing a certain position. As coaches interact with stakeholders, they learn about the subtleties of the role. This includes lessons on managing priorities, modeling behavior and providing perspective. These require a different skill set than teaching a kid how to throw a baseball.

This study analyzes the challenges of a parent coach through a dramaturgical lens. Examining the distinction between front stage and back stage is a useful way for a coach to manage the performance of the team and to interact with parents. By understanding the concept of stage collision, a parent coach can more effectively communicate with parents and keep assumptions in check. This study expands the research of parent coaches by looking at their role as part of the dramaturgy of youth baseball.

As noted above, the divergent youth baseball programs exacerbated the balancing act of having fun and competing as a guiding premise for Little League coaches. This is a difficult task for a parent coach. There are culture, participation and rule implications of these premises. When a coach's objective is to create a fun atmosphere, everyone is a winner, participation is maximized and rules are protective. Conversely, when a coach competes, there are winners and losers, player participation is variable and rules are leveraged to win.

Becoming a Coach Type

In this study, participants suggested that effective coaches can relate well to others, manage talent and leverage rules. Coaches who simultaneously do all three optimize the balance of "fun" and "competing." Using these characteristics, a dynamic coaching model emerged that identified four coach types: enlisted, altruistic, exploiter and ideal. The ideal coach most effectively delivers a fun, competitive experience for the players.

Implications

The implications from this research revolve around a new understanding of the challenges faced by youth parent coaches. It is a volunteer role that balances work, family and community priorities. It is difficult for the parent coach to invest time in development activities to better perform the role. Rather, parent coaches rely on "on the job" training, often at the expense of the players and parents. This research provides new insights into the importance of the coach's role on the overall experience of all the stakeholders of the game. It is the lynchpin of the experience. In this section, I

will examine the implications of my research for institutions, youth sports administrators and parent coaches.

Institutions

Foremost in this study is the institution of Little League Baseball. Per its web site, Little League currently has 2.4 million child participants and over 1.5 million adult volunteers. It is a significant undertaking to execute the operations of the program each year. In this study, it was revealed that an institution of this size may not be as flexible as needed by those interested in the game of baseball. Traveling baseball is a phenomenon that has grown in many sports. One of the key drivers is control. Administrators and parents want more control over the experience. The implication for Little League is to consider alternative programs without straying too far from its participative mission.

Another implication for Little League is to balance ideology and myth with what I would call operational effectiveness. Little League is a valuable brand. Cities pay charter fees to be affiliated with Little League. As some point, administrators will ask about the value. Associations can charter a Traveling or recreational league for less money. Is the mythic narrative of the Little League World Series worth the price of the charter? What about the headaches that come with rules such as having all twelve year olds play in the Majors? That is an ideological ruling, one that was initially difficult for local leagues to administer. In addition, Little League needs to manage the consistency of its strategic communication. The pitch count rules are best in class. So is the idea

that young pitchers should not throw curve balls. Then why do you see so many young kids on ESPN throwing curve balls during the Little League World Series?

Youth Sports Administrators

The implication for youth sports administrators begins with coach recruiting and development. As with Sterling City, many associations find it difficult to fill the open coach positions, taking almost anyone that steps forward and often enlisting people who grudgingly accept the role. Once coaches have been identified, administrators need to focus on a development plan that includes helping coaches relate to others, manage talent and leverage rules. In this study, these were identified as the key attributes of effective coaches. The required attribute is that coaches have relational skills. Given that teams usually have two to three coaches, administrators can pair coaches to ensure that they have the right mix of attributes for each team.

Another implication for youth sport administrators is at the high school level. It is in the best interest of the high school athletic director & baseball coach to be engaged with the youth baseball associations to ensure that the coaches are developing the kids correctly and in a way that mitigates attrition. Kids that have a bad experience due to coaching will quit the sport and look for alternatives. That does not help the high school baseball team in the long run. Parents that are tired of the infighting between multiple baseball associations will potentially look for alternatives for their kids or simply disengage from a volunteer role. A high school athletic director or high school baseball coach can also provide a vision of the future for the youth sport association.

Coaches

The key implication for coaches is to better understand the nuances and dynamics of their role. Teaching skills like bunting or base running is important. So is managing a diverse team, relating to the needs of parents and managing multiple priorities. These are leadership competencies that a coach may or may not bring into the position. In addition, the overall success of the team is a function of how the coach manages their own child. How a coach approaches this dynamic may have implications for the team and the relationship with their child. Many coaches live with regrets simply because of a lack of reflection and planning.

Coaches also need to recognize the inherent tension between competing and having fun. Part of this is alignment to the mission of the organization. If the organization is explicit about winning, parents will pay for that particular product. If the mission is a balance of competing and having fun, a coach needs to recognize the components of effectiveness and develop into what I identified as an ideal coach. This coach type understands how to relate to others, manage talent and leverage the rules of the game.

Finally, coaches need to assess their own talents and opportunities for growth. If a coach does not understand the tryout and draft process, they need to speak up and ask for help. Finding a mentor or partnering with an experienced coach would help. The potential experience of an entire team is at the mercy of decisions that coaches make when forming teams, conducting practices and communicating to parents. If the

association for which you are volunteering is not providing support, find the support elsewhere.

Parents

The implications for non-coaching parents relate to the choice that they make throughout the cycle of the baseball season. According to the coaches interviewed, parents can do more harm if they are not clear on their role. If they do not know about baseball, they should not try to teach skills. Let the coach teach skills. It is unfortunate for a kid to get conflicting advice from a parent or coach, when the child simply wants to please both.

Parents need to consider their own motives when making a choice for a youth sports program. Are they signing their kid up to play Traveling for the kid or for themselves? Are they pushing their kid towards a higher level of play because the child wants it? Or, is the child simply trying to please their parents? Many coaches, including myself, have regrets about placing our motives and aspirations on our children, instead of recognizing what was truly best for the kid.

Recommendations for Further Research

Having been a parent coach, I would have liked to learn about the intricacies of the role at the beginning of my coaching journey. Most of my initial and ongoing learning focused on skill development. What about the other aspects of being a parent coach? What are the strategies for managing favoritism or balancing an experience that is fun and competitive? Considering that this was an exploratory study, there are many

research topics that would add to the literature. The following are topics that can build upon the research in this study to gain a more thorough understanding:

- Study cities with a single association for respective sports

In this study, Sterling City had two competing youth sport organizations for baseball between the ages of ten and twelve. This resulted in marketing and recruiting efforts to get the most talented players that put stress on both organizations. It is clear from the coach stories that this has fractured the community and created ongoing conflict. What are the opportunities and challenges of single youth sport associations that manages all the kids in a given sport, in a given community?

- Study the impact on children of being “committed” to a single sport before puberty

Traveling baseball in Sterling City is open to those “committed to more baseball.” As mentioned throughout the study, the kids that play Traveling practice more, play more games and travel to other cities for weekend tournaments. This is not an option for kids that want a recreational option or cannot afford the cost. What are the motivations for a higher commitment to a sport? In this study, the motivation and objective was to prepare for the high school and legion levels of baseball. Does the assessment and allocation of pre-pubescent kids to a “committed” program payoff over time? This could be a longitudinal study to determine the percentage of kids from recreational programs vs. Traveling programs that play high school and beyond.

- Study best practices for how coaches manage favoritism

While approaches to managing favoritism have emerged in this study, they are reactive and reflect the history of a group of veteran parent coaches. Given that volunteer, parent coaches will continue to constitute a majority of those in youth sport coaching positions, it would be useful to understand the most effective ways to optimize the relationship with their child, in conjunction with other stakeholders.

- Study how youth sport organizations recruit and develop coaches

The research confirms that most youth sport organizations focus on developing the skills needed for a given sport. This study has identified a number of soft, interpersonal skills needed to be an effective, ideal coach. How do youth sport organization recruit coaches? Clearly, these non-profit organizations leverage registration, tryouts and referrals to effectively staff their open coaching positions. Do they have recruiting plans? Little League organizations are required to conduct background checks on all coaching and administrative positions. This is primarily to assess a criminal background. What about assessing a potential coach's ability to be an effective coach? It seems like investing in selection and development strategies would be the greatest lever that youth sports organization could pull to create a successful experience for kids.

- Study the "business" of youth sports

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Little League recently signed a \$60 million contract with ESPN to televise the Little League World Series. In an era of privatization, Little League evolved from a "government services" like organization, to one that competes with new programs such as Traveling. Participation in youth sports is decreasing, yet "lucrative"

contacts with ESPN continue to improve. How does Little League bridge its legacy with its aspirations and how does this reflect the current business of youth sports?

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Appendix A: Consent Form



Consent Form

[383094-1] Car Stories & Bleacher Observations

You are invited to participate in a research study about parent coaching in youth baseball. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your expertise in the field of coaching. You are eligible to participate in this study because of your experience in the research setting. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Rich DeMarco. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

Background Information

The research is theoretically significant to those studying the practice of coaching. The number of children in youth sports is increasing. Yet, coaches are primarily volunteers with little or no training. Much is written about how to develop skills in children. However, very little is written regarding the interactions between coaches and kids and how these interactions shape meaning. The purpose of this case study is exploratory and will use grounded theory as an approach. Interviews will be conducted with adults.

The overall questions that will guide the research are as follows:

- What can we learn from parent's regarding the interactions between coaches and kids?
- Through their interactions, how do coaches shape meaning for kids?
- How do parent perspectives on coaches and the activities align with coaches perspectives?
- In what ways do administrators shape the experience?

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Participate in a 1-2 hour interview and potential follow-up questions. Interviews will be conducted at my home, the participant's home or a coffee shop. There will be 15

participants and all interviews will be recorded. Rev.com will be used for transcriptions services.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has risks. The risk being the possible invasion of privacy of subject or family. To minimize the risk to participants, I will use pseudonyms throughout the research. All information will be kept confidential. Participants will have the opportunity at any time to withdraw from the research or request certain information not be included in the final research study. The direct benefits you will receive for participating are: There are no direct benefits or compensation.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Your privacy & confidentiality will be protected while you participate in this study. The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. The types of records I will create include recordings and transcripts which will be stored at my house in a locked file cabinet. Records will be destroyed within three years. Only my chair, Dr. Don LaMagdeleine, and I will have access to the original interviews. We will use encrypted email in all correspondence. All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years upon completion of the study. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas reserve the right to inspect all research records to ensure compliance.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with myself, the baseball associations in the context, or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed immediately. You can withdraw by contacting myself via phone call or email. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask during the interview by simply saying, "Pass."

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have now and any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-900-4564 or demarcorich@comcast.net. You may also contact my chair, Dr. Don LaMagdeleine, at 651-962-4893 or drlamagdelei@stthomas.edu. You may also contact the University of

St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns.

Statement of Consent

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age and I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix B: Interview Questions

-Tell me about your baseball background. When did it start and how are you currently involved.

-In addition to coaching, what administrative roles have you served?

-What was it like to be a parent coach?

-What would you say was the greatest challenge of being a parent coach?

-Tell me about you coach to fun and competitive outcomes.

-How would you describe the types of coaches that exist in youth sports?

-What do you think is the reason for the historical and ongoing conflict between the Traveling and Little League organizations?

-What is your favorite memory or proudest moment as a coach?

Appendix C: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board



Institutional Review Board - University of St. Thomas
2115 Summit Ave. - Mail #AQU319
St. Paul, MN 55105-1078
Phone: 651-962-5341 - Email: irb@stthomas.edu

DATE: March 24, 2014

TO: Richard DeMarco
FROM: University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [383094-1] Car Stories & Bleacher Observations
REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: December 5, 2012
EXPIRATION DATE: December 5, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of December 5, 2014.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Eleni Roulis at 651-962-5341 or 9roulis@stthomas.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Best wishes as you begin your research.

Thank you for your work.

Eleni Roulis, Ph.D.
AVP Academic Affairs/IRB Administrator

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix D: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Rev.com provided transcription services. The following is the confidentiality agreement on the company's web-site (date of last revision, February, 12, 2015).

Confidentiality: Any documents or other text that you provide to Rev for the purpose of providing the Services will be your "Confidential Information," except to the extent such documents (a) are known to Rev prior to receipt from you from a source other than one having an obligation of confidentiality to you; (b) become known (independently of disclosure by you) to Rev directly or indirectly from a source other than one having an obligation of confidentiality to you; or (c) become publicly known or otherwise cease to be secret or confidential, except through a breach of this Section by Rev. Rev will use the Confidential Information solely for the purpose of providing the Services to you (the "Permitted Purpose"). Rev will not, without your prior consent, disclose to any third party your Confidential Information, other than furnishing such Confidential Information to our directors, officers, employees, agents, consultants, contractors, representatives or affiliated entities (collectively, "Associated Persons") who need to have access to such Confidential Information in connection with the Permitted Purpose. Rev will use at least reasonable care to protect the confidentiality of your Confidential Information. In the event that Rev is required by law to make any disclosure of any of your Confidential Information, by subpoena, judicial or administrative order or otherwise, Rev will use commercially reasonable efforts to give you notice of such requirement (to the extent legally permissible) and will permit you to intervene in any relevant proceedings to protect your interests in your Confidential Information.